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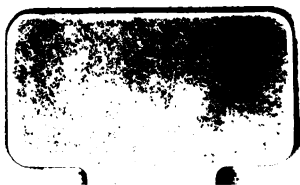
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AN
ABRIDGMENT
OF THE
HOLY SCRIPTURES.

“From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are
able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith
which is in Christ Jesus.”—2 TIM. iii. 15.

BY THE
REV. MR. SELLON,
LATE MINISTER OF ST. JAMES'S, CLERKENWELL.



NEW EDITION,
ADAPTED TO THE USE OF THE SOCIETY.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE:

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LONDON:
RICHARD CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD STREET HILL.


AN
ABRIDGMENT
OF THE
HOLY SCRIPTURES.


CHAPTER I.

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.

IN the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. The great Creator himself never had a beginning. *God is from everlasting to everlasting.* But there was a time when this world and all things in it began to be. He made them at his own pleasure; at that time, and in that manner, which he saw best and fittest for the wonderful work. He created the sun, moon, and stars; he made the air, the earth, and the sea, and filled them with various living creatures, birds, beasts, and fishes. He then formed man of the dust of the ground, and called him *Adam*, (because that word in Hebrew signifies *earth* or *ground*,) and infused into him the breath of life; so that he is related both to spirit and matter, and hath both united in himself. *It was not good, however, for man to be alone; to remain destitute of a rational companion; therefore the Almighty, having taken one of his ribs, while he was sleeping, made a woman of it, and she became his wife. God probably formed the woman in this particular manner, to remind husbands and wives of their near relation, and the tender love which ought always to subsist between them. Adam called her Eve, that word signifying life, because she was to be the mother of all living.* On the seventh day.

God rested from his works : not that the creation was attended with any *labour* and *fatigue* to him ; but having finished the things which he intended to make at that time, he left off. He then viewed them with pleasure, and pronounced them to be *very good*.

 What an idea of the *power* of God does the creation give us ! He only said, *Let there be light*, and *there was light*. *He spake, and the earth was made ; the heavens and all the host of them had their being by the breath of his mouth.*—He is as *wise*, too, as he is *powerful* ; the more we consider the beauty, the variety, and the usefulness of the things which are made, the more clearly do we see that they are the works of the highest wisdom and contrivance. *O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all.*—How great also is the goodness of God ! It is owing to his free goodness that any creatures were formed ; and *his tender mercies are over all his works*. *In him we live, and move, and have our being*. *He giveth us all things richly to enjoy, and hath bestowed such love upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.*

 Who can sufficiently declare the works of thy power, wisdom, and goodness, O thou all-creating and all-supporting God ? *who can utter all thy praise ?*—Imprint upon my mind a deep sense of thine infinite excellences : and teach me, O thou Father of spirits, to love thee with all my heart, to fear thee with the profoundest reverence, to put a steady trust and confidence in thee, to worship thee with a pure adoration, and to honour and obey thee in the whole course of my life.


CHAPTER II.


THE FALL.



MAN was created innocent and upright, with powers of understanding and will after the image of God ; (for it is in these respects that the Scriptures


say, *man was made in the image of God.*) He was immediately placed in the fruitful and pleasant garden of *Eden*, where he enjoyed many happy tokens of his Maker's love, and was indulged in the free use of all the delights that surrounded him ; with one only restraint, as a test or trial of his obedience. *He* was forbidden to touch the fruit of one tree, in the middle of the garden, which was called *the Tree of Knowledge*, the knowledge of good and evil : with a solemn assurance from God, that, if he did touch it, he should die.

Our first parents, while they were obedient to God, enjoyed uninterrupted ease and happiness : and if they had preserved their innocence in this state of trial, would have been raised, in due time, from earth to heaven. But they ungratefully broke the Divine command ; and ate of the fruit of that tree which they were forbidden to eat. *Thus sin entered into the world, and death by sin* ; the human constitution was immediately debased and impaired ; and a sinful, corrupt nature, subject to disease and death, was derived from *Adam* to all his posterity.

 What could be the cause of their guilt ? What could induce them to commit an act by which they forfeited their life and happiness ; and how could they be prevailed upon to disobey their great Creator and Benefactor ?—It was by giving ear to evil counsel ; for the *Devil*, the grand adversary of God and Man, appeared in the form of a *serpent* ; or, as some think the original word may be translated, a flaming angel, like one of those who attended the Lord. He was originally an angel in heaven, but was cast down for his pride and disobedience ; and is represented in Scripture as full of malice, envy, and deceit, seeking to spread misery and ruin through the world, by suggesting evil thoughts and tempting men to sin. With this dreadful design he accosted *Eve*, and by artfully raising in her mind a foolish, wicked curiosity, and a desire of happiness above her state, prevailed on her to taste

the forbidden fruit. She was pleased with the relish of it, and persuaded her husband also to eat some. Their eyes were immediately opened; they saw their guilt and their wretchedness, and felt the stings and lashes of an avenging conscience.  *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.*

Before they had sinned, they had been graciously admitted to converse with their Maker, and had unspeakable delight in the sacred intercourse; but as soon as they had transgressed his command, shame and consciousness of guilt took place; they were afraid of his looking on them, and when they heard the sounds of his presence in the garden, endeavoured to hide themselves from him.  But, alas! *there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.* He called forth the criminals, who tried to excuse *themselves* by throwing the blame of their wickedness upon *others*. Adam laid the blame of what he had done upon his wife; and Eve, on the other hand, accused the *serpent*.  God, however, *is not mocked*: palliating excuses are but as *a spider's web*; while an honest confession and resolution of amendment will effectually recommend the sinner to mercy.—He immediately pronounced sentence upon the offenders; but, at the same time, to comfort them under their distress, he gave them a gracious intimation, that he would raise up in future time a Deliverer, who should bruise the serpent's head, and triumph over their malicious enemy. He then drove them out of the garden of *Paradise*, and sent them into a country towards the east, where they were obliged to dig and labour for their support, till, at last, they died.

 We sin against God when we neglect to do what he has commanded, or when we do what he has forbidden: and we may judge of the hatred of God against sin, by the punishment inflicted upon Adam, and the express declaration of his holy word. *The soul that sinneth shall die*: and, *the wages of sin is*

death. This death consisteth, not merely in the separation of the soul from the body, but more especially in the separation of the soul and body, when re-united, from the blessed presence of God. *Fear not them who kill the body, but who are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* How great then is the guilt and folly of those who make a mock at sin, and take pleasure in that which is so offensive to their Creator, and productive of so much misery! Oh, let us all confess our offences at the footstool of a pure God, and with sincere dependence on the great Mediator and Redeemer, who was but obscurely revealed to *Adam*, but who, in these our days, hath been *manifest in the flesh, and brought life and immortality to light*; let us embrace the gracious terms of the new covenant; and resolve, by the Divine assistance, to cleanse our hearts from the love of sin, to cherish an hatred and abhorrence of it, and to *bring forth fruit unto holiness.*




CHAPTER III.

CAIN AND ABEL.

Cain and Abel, the two first sons of *Adam* and *Eve*, (whose family was gradually increased,) pursued very different employments. *Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.* Their tempers were as different as their occupations. *Abel* was a lover of righteousness, and obedient to his parents; but *Cain* was obstinate and wicked, neither fearing God nor loving man. It was usual, in the infancy of the world, to present oblations to God, the giver of every good gift; and when the brothers brought their offerings, *Abel of the firstlings of his flock, and Cain of the fruit of the ground*, the sacrifice of *Abel*, on account of his piety and goodness, was more acceptable to God than the

offering of *Cain*; and *God bore witness to his gifts*, by some visible token of his favour. The Lord also condescended to reason with *Cain*, and to assure him, that if he would be good and righteous, he and his offering should likewise be accepted. But, instead of reforming his behaviour and temper, he grew worse and worse: he hated his brother more and more; and at length his malice and anger became so violent, that he *rose up against Abel and slew him*. He flattered himself that there was no witness of his guilt, and that no one would know it; but there is no safety, except in innocence and virtue. Wherever we are, and whatever we do, we are under the immediate eye of God. The Almighty Judge was a spectator of the crime, and afterwards expostulated with him: *Where is Abel thy brother? What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth from the ground*. He then pronounced judgment upon the murderer: in consequence of which *Cain* removed with his wife and children from his habitation, and having wandered from place to place, *as a fugitive and a vagabond*, at length settled in the land of *Nod*. He, however, still carried the mark of his guilt along with him. He was vexed with the horror of conscience within, and calamities without; and walked upon earth a woful spectacle, labouring under the distemper of a wounded spirit, which no medicine can cure.

 Learn, from the wickedness and misery of *Cain*, to correct and regulate your own life. Do not content yourself with the mere outward forms of devotion, but lift up your heart with your hands unto the Lord. Guard carefully against the first approaches of hatred and malice, lest they should increase upon you by degrees, and hurry you into the most shocking excesses. *An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgressions*.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLOOD.


GOD was pleased to comfort *Adam* and *Eve* Before for the loss of *Abel*, by giving them another Christ son, whom they called *Seth*. *Moses*, who wrote 3874. this account, has not given us the names of all the children of *Adam*; for he intended only to set forth the *creation*, and some remarkable *events*, and to point out the *particular family* from which the Saviour of the world was to arise. The descendants of *Seth* were so eminent for their piety and virtue, that they were called *the sons of God*; and one of them, *Enoch*, was so beloved by the Almighty, that he was taken up into heaven, without suffering the pains of death: but the family of *Cain*, being impious and corrupt, were called, by way of distinction, *the sons and daughters of men*.

After a long course of time, however, the descendants of *Seth* also neglected the worship and service of the great Creator: and being allured by the beauty of the women, who were of the race of *Cain*, gave themselves up to the indulgence of sinful appetites. By degrees the human race was overspread with sin; *all flesh corrupted its way upon the earth, and every imagination of the heart was only evil continually*. God was pleased to use various methods to bring them to repentance, and turn them from their evil ways: but they would not hear his voice: they trampled upon his mercies, and despised all his warnings; and grew worse and worse, more and more abandoned: till the time of punishment came, and the Almighty *destroyed the world of the ungodly by a flood of waters*.

But *Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord*. *Noah was a just man, and walked with God*: he was diligent in the discharge of his duty both towards God and towards man, and, therefore, God was

pleased to save him from the general destruction ; and not only him, but, for his sake, his wife, and his three sons, and their wives. For this purpose he commanded him to make a large vessel, called an *ark*, after a particular plan ; and when it was completed, he shut up and secured in it him and his family, *and some of every living thing of all flesh*, with proper provision for their subsistence.

Before Christ As soon as this was done, the flood came on with great violence. In the very same 2349. day, *all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows (or flood gates) of heaven were opened ; so that the waters in a short time prevailed exceedingly upon the earth, and all the high hills, which were under the whole heavens, were covered.* The wretched inhabitants began to feel the truth of those threatenings which they had laughed at and despised. Now at last they lift up their hands to heaven, and cry out to God for help ; but, alas ! all in vain. The sentence is gone forth ; judgment hath taken hold of them ; the mighty waters are pouring upon them on every side, and nothing is to be seen but vengeance and destruction.

 *By the word of God, saith St. Peter, the world which then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment. What manner of persons, therefore, ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness !*

CHAPTER V.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH.

In the midst of judgment God remembers mercy. Though the destruction by the flood was so general and extensive, yet he preserved a small remnant of the human race, from whom a new generation was


to be raised. The ark floated safely from place to place upon the waters, till God caused them gradually to decrease : at length it rested upon *Mount Ararat* ; and some time after, when the earth was in a proper state for their habitation, he directed *Noah* to go out of the ark, and to take his family and all the creatures with him. As soon as they had set their feet upon the land, *Noah* raised an altar to the Lord, and they offered sacrifices, pouring forth thanks to the Almighty for their wonderful preservation. God was pleased with this mark of pious gratitude, and established a covenant with *Noah* and his children, that he would not any more destroy the world by a flood ; and added this gracious promise, *while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.*

He then also appointed the rainbow to be an everlasting token of his covenant and promise. *It compasseth the Heaven with a glorious circle, and the hands of the Most High have bended it.* He likewise renewed to *Noah* the blessing, which he had given to *Adam* at the beginning, of a dominion over the earth, and all the creatures in it ; and added the privilege of killing any of them for food. *Noah* lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood ; and it is not to be doubted, but that he took great care to train up his children, and his descendants, which were soon multiplied upon the earth, in the way of piety and holiness. He was certainly well qualified to promote the knowledge and practice of religion, and to instruct mankind concerning the attributes and perfections of God, a governing Providence, the Fall of Man, and the promise of a Redeemer and Deliverer ; of which gracious promise, *Noah* was now become the heir, and through him it was to be handed down to succeeding generations.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TOWER OF BABEL, OR CONFUSION OF
LANGUAGES.

Before Christ 2247. THE sons of *Noah* were *Japheth*, *Shem*, and *Ham*, whose descendants soon became so numerous, that they could not live together in one family, or agree in any general plan of government: and therefore many of them resolved to form themselves into a separate society, and to remove into some other country. Accordingly they left their great ancestor *Noah*, (who is supposed to have been the founder of the Chinese empire,) and journeyed *from the east*, till they came to a pleasant and fruitful plain in the land of *Shinar*. There they determined to fix their habitation: and soon becoming ambitious of distinguishing themselves, and establishing a powerful kingdom, they began to build a very high tower: but what they, in their fond conceit, intended to be a monument of their fame and power, was made a monument of their pride and folly. For, while they were at work, God produced divers languages among them; though they retained the power of speaking, yet he caused them to express their thoughts by new sounds, so that they could not understand one another. This sudden change excited such a tumult and confusion among the builders, that they were obliged to leave their work unfinished. After which, having quitted *Babel* in different parties, accordingly as they understood each other's language, they settled in separate countries; and, gradually as they increased, they spread more and more, till the human race was dispersed over the face of the earth.

 The measures of our conduct should be formed by a regard to the Divine will, and not by our own vain whims and fancies. *Pride was not*

made for man: it has frequently hurried persons into the most fatal misconduct, and indeed into destruction. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. He that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

CHAPTER VII.


THE CALL OF ABRAM.

THE family of *Shem*, from which the great Redeemer was to come, settled at *Ur*, in *Chaldea*: but the principles of true religion soon decayed upon the earth; the belief and worship of the one Supreme Being gradually degenerated; and the world in general was at length overrun with idolatry and wickedness. But *Abram*, the son of *Terah*, a descendant of *Shem*, was remarkable for his understanding and piety; and therefore the Almighty called him out of *Ur*, when he was seventy-five years of age. Accordingly he went with his father, and *Sarai* his wife, and his nephew *Lot*, into *Haran*: from whence, after the death of *Terah*, he removed, by the Divine direction, into the land of *Canaan*. He was taken from his country and father's house, that he might be the father of a peculiar nation, whom God designed to train up in the knowledge and worship of himself, and the promise of a Saviour: and God encouraged and comforted him in the undertaking by a solemn assurance that he would bless him, and make him a great nation: *I will make of thee, says he, a great nation; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

Abram and *Lot* lived together with their families in the land of *Canaan*. They were eminent examples of piety and holiness; therefore God loved them and blessed them. At length their herds and flocks increased so much, that there was not sufficient room in the place where they dwelt: and debates arose between their servants about convenient pasturage. Upon which *Abram*, with great condescension and humanity, proposed to *Lot*, that they should part, and offered him the choice, either to continue where he then was, or to remove to another place.  How honourable is this condescension in *Abram* to his nephew *Lot*! And how powerfully does it recommend to us meekness and forbearance, and the love of peace and concord!—*Lot* chose the plain of *Jordan*, which was every where well watered, and pitched his tent near *Sodom*; but he had not been settled there many years, when *Chedorlaomer*, king of *Elam*, in *Persia*, brought an army against the king of *Sodom*, who had rebelled against him; and, having overrun several kingdoms about the land of *Canaan*, carried away much spoil, and many captives, among whom were *Lot* and his family. *Abram* was immediately informed of what was done, and, having armed his trained servants, pursued the enemy, attacked them by surprise in the night, rescued all the captives, and brought back *Lot* and his goods to his former habitation.

Before The inhabitants of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*
 Christ were, however, so lost to all sense of religion,
 1897. and so given up to impure lusts, that God
 resolved to destroy them. But at the same time
 that he manifested such an abhorrence of sin and
 wickedness, he showed a distinguished regard to

eminent piety and goodness, by sending two angels for the preservation of *Lot*. ¶ Angels are a particular kind of beings, much superior to men : they are represented as performing the commandments of God with unwearied alacrity and diligence ; and are said to be *ministering spirits sent forth to be ministers for them who shall be heirs of salvation*.

The two angels came to *Lot* in the appearance of men ; and as he supposed them to be travellers, he entertained them in a friendly, hospitable manner. ¶ They were strangers, and he took them in. They soon acquainted him that they were sent to execute vengeance upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, for their aggravated iniquities, and to rescue him and his family from the dreadful ruin. They accordingly took *Lot* and his wife, and his two daughters : and, having led them out of the city, charged them to flee from the danger without the least delay. But, as they went towards *Zoar*, the wife of *Lot*, either out of vain curiosity to see what became of the place, or a fond desire of returning to her old habitation, looked or returned back ; for which she became a *pillar of salt* ; a lasting monument of her folly and disobedience !—Then God sent fire and brimstone out of heaven upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, and the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. He overthrew the cities and all the inhabitants ; and made them an example to those who should afterwards live ungodly.

CHAPTER IX.


THE BIRTH OF ISAAC.

GOD was pleased with the piety and virtue of *Abram*, and promised to be his protector and shield of defence, and to give him an exceeding great reward. *Abram* was desirous of having a son, in preference to all earthly blessings and rewards : and

with great humility expressed some uneasiness before the Lord, because he was yet childless, and had only *Eliezer*, the steward of his house, to succeed him : upon which God promised, that a son of his own should be his heir, and that his race should be as the stars in multitude. Some years afterwards God renewed his covenant with *Abram*, and changed his name to *Abraham*, because (according to the meaning of the word) he was to be *the father of many nations* : and he changed the name of *Sarai*, which signifies *my princess*, to *Sarah*, which signifies *the princess* in a large and extensive sense, according to the promise of God, *she shall be a mother* (or princess) *of nations ; kings of people shall be of her*. The Almighty at the same time assured him, that *Sarah should have a son*, who should be called *Isaac* ; and that *He would establish his covenant with him, and that all the people of the earth should be blessed through him* : the meaning of which was, that his descendants should be heirs of the great universal promise, and a person should arise from them, who would be the Saviour of the world, and a blessing to all nations.

Sarah, indeed, because she was now grown old, placed very little dependence upon this promise, and even *laughed at it within herself* ; for which the Lord reproved her. But *Abraham* waited with patience for the performance of His word, which never fails, *being fully persuaded, that what God had promised, He was also able to perform*.

The time appointed at length came, and *Sarah* brought forth a son, who was called *Isaac*. This was an occasion of great joy ; and he proved an increasing comfort and blessing to his aged parents ; for, as he grew in years and stature, he improved in knowledge and goodness : because *Abraham commanded his children and his household to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment*.

 Parents, *bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord : train them*

up in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not depart from it.

Children, *honour and obey your parents ; for that is well-pleasing to the Lord : and it shall be well with you, both in this world and in the next.*




CHAPTER X.

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL.

WHEN some years had passed after the first promise of a son to *Abraham*, and *Sarah* still continued childless, she gave up all expectation of becoming a mother herself, and concluded that the promised heir was to be born of another woman. She therefore persuaded her husband to take *Hagar*, her handmaid, as a wife. *Hagar* became proud upon this change of her condition, and treated her mistress with contempt and insolence ; and, after the birth of *Isaac*, *Ishmael*, the son of *Hagar*, looking upon him with an envious and jealous eye, made a mock and derision of him. At this behaviour *Sarah* was so offended, that she importuned *Abraham* to exclude *Hagar* and her son from the family : and, when the father was in great perplexity upon the occasion, the Lord confirmed the request of *Sarah*, and directed him to send away the mother and the son ; promising that *Ishmael* should become a nation, but at the same time declaring, that in *Isaac* his seed should be called.

There was a great difference, according to the Apostle *Paul*, between these sons : for *Ishmael*, the son of *Hagar* the bond-woman, was born only according to the flesh, in the common course of nature ; but *Isaac* was born by virtue of the promise, and by the particular interposition of Divine power. They represent to us the two covenants of the Law and the Gospel : the former is a state of bondage and servility ; the latter a state of


freedom and glorious privileges. *The ministration of Moses was weak and unprofitable*, when compared with the Gospel, which is the *ministration of righteousness, of life, and the Spirit*; and the difference between the Jewish and the Christian state is like that between childhood and manhood, between shadow and substance, between bondage and liberty.  How thankful, then, should we be to God that we are children of the free-woman, called under the liberal and happy dispensation of the Gospel, and made heirs of the blessings of the covenant through the promised seed, of whom it was declared, that in it *all the families of the earth should be blessed*.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM IN OFFERING ISAAC.

THE Almighty was pleased to make another trial of the faith and obedience of *Abraham*; or, rather, to manifest them more fully to the world; and make him an illustrious pattern to all posterity. He commanded him to take *Isaac*, when he was about twenty-five years of age, and *offer him for a burnt-offering* upon mount *Moriah*. Severe as the command was, though *Isaac* was his son, his only son, whom he loved with all the affection of a tender father, though he was the very son, of whom it was expressly said, *in Isaac shall thy seed be called*, he readily complied. He reasoned with himself, that God, who had given him a son, as it were by a miracle, when, in the course of nature, there was no hope of children, was able even to raise him from the dead; and therefore, *being strong in faith, he staggered not*. He rose early the next morning, and took *Isaac* to the mountain; the fatal knife was in his hand; his son lay panting upon the altar; and he was just giving the deadly stroke,

when an angel stayed his hand. As he looked round in surprise, he saw a ram caught in a thicket; and, having seized it, he offered it for a burnt-offering instead of his son. For this great act of faith, and trust in the Supreme Being, *Abraham* was honoured with the glorious name of *father of the faithful*: and God immediately renewed his promise to him, that he would bless him very abundantly, and multiply his family: *In thy seed*, said he, *shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.*

 We are taught by this instance of obedience, to love God above every thing upon earth, and to resign, with a willing mind, our fortune, our children, our dearest comforts, whenever he calls for them.—We cannot but observe further, that this particular action, required from *Abraham*, was a remarkable type or representation of what was done afterwards, and, it is supposed, upon the same mountain: and seems intended to point out to him, and to succeeding generations, the particular method by which God purposed to redeem mankind, by offering up his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LIFE OF ISAAC.

THE peace and prosperity of *Abraham* were, Before in a few years, disturbed by the death of *Christ Sarah*, whom he buried in the cave of *Mach-* 1859. *pelah*; after which, considering that he was far advanced in years, and being desirous of seeing his son *Isaac* happily married, he sent a faithful servant into *Mesopotamia*, to seek a wife for him among his own kindred, for he did not approve of the women of that country in which he lived, because they were idolaters. The servant, being guided by Providence, brought home *Rebekah*, the

daughter of *Bethuel*, the nephew of *Abraham*, Before and *Isaac* took her to wife.—The good old Christ man saw them flourishing in plenty and hap- 1821. piness, and at length, having quitted this world to go to God, whom he had faithfully served, he was buried in the cave near his beloved *Sarah*.

Some time after the death of *Abraham*, a severe famine raged through the land of *Canaan*; and *Isaac*, in order to avoid the distress, went unto *Gerar*, in his way towards *Egypt*. There the Lord appeared unto him, and commanded him to dwell in that land, assuring him that he would exceedingly increase both his family and his possessions, and renewing to him that grand promise of the Messiah, *In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*.

There he sowed corn, and received in the same year an hundred fold; and his servants and cattle increased in such abundance, that people envied his prosperity, and began to fear his power; therefore *Abimelech*, their king, in order to satisfy his subjects, desired him, in a friendly manner, to leave the city, and seek out some other habitation. Accordingly *Isaac* retired to the valley of *Gerar*, and afterwards removed to *Beersheba*, where he fixed his abode, and built an altar to the Lord.


Isaac and *Rebekah* had two sons, who were named *Esau* and *Jacob*: *Esau*, the elder, was a cunning hunter, but *Jacob* was a plain man, of a gentle disposition, and employed himself in domestic affairs. One day *Esau*, returning from the fields very hungry and tired, earnestly desired some pottage, which *Jacob* was preparing for himself; and *Jacob* asked him for his *birthright* in exchange. Now the particular blessing of his father *Isaac*, and the especial promises of God concerning the land of *Canaan*, and the descent of Christ, were annexed to his birthright; but *Esau*, being wholly given up to hunting and sporting, and of a loose profane disposition, set little value upon it, and readily exchanged it for the mess of pottage, which he so

greedily longed for. ¶ Thus also does every unthinking sinner; he sells his birthright *for a mess of pottage, and a morsel of meat*; for present momentary gratification, he gives up the blessing of his heavenly Father, and parts with his eternal portion in the kingdom of glory.

After several years, *Isaac*, who was ignorant of the contract between his sons, being very old and blind, and apprehending that his death was near, sent *Esau* to get some venison, and dress it; with a promise that after he had eaten he would give him his blessing. *Rebekah* heard the words of *Isaac*; and having an extraordinary affection and fondness for *Jacob*, she dressed a kid with savoury sauce, and covered his neck and hands with the skin of the kid, because *Esau's* hands were hairy, and sent him to his father. *Isaac* was deceived by these means; and mistaking *Jacob* for *Esau*, gave him his blessing.

As soon as *Jacob* was gone out from the presence of his father, *Esau* returned; and having found that his brother had gained the blessing, he cried out, *Is he not rightly named Jacob?* (that is, *a supplanter*) *for he supplanted me twice; he took away my birth-right, and now he hath taken away my blessing.* Stung with penitent remorse for his folly, he entreated his father, *Hast thou but one blessing? bless me, even me also, O my Father.* ¶ But his repentance came too late; therefore he is said *to find no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears*; for the blessing was given to *Jacob*, and not to be recalled; *I have blessed him, says Isaac, yea, and he shall be blessed.*

Rebekah and *Jacob* are not to be commended for deceiving *Isaac*. ¶ The method pursued by them in order to obtain the blessing was inconsistent with truth and honesty; and we should never tell lies, whatever advantage may be expected from them. Indeed, the blessing was intended for *Jacob*, by the sovereign purpose of God; and *Rebekah* knew it;

for it had been revealed to her, before her sons were born, *that the younger should be preferred before the elder*; therefore, instead of deceiving and imposing upon her husband in this matter, she should have waited patiently, till God had been pleased to bring it about in his own time, and in his own way. He thought proper, however, to let the blessing pass in this manner;  for he over-rules the schemes and contrivances of short-sighted mortals, and makes them subservient to his own wise and gracious purposes.

CHAPTER XIII.


THE LIFE OF JACOB.

Before Christ 1760. *Esau* was full of resentment and fury against *Jacob* for having deprived him of his birth-right and blessing, and threatened to kill him. He did not remember the sad story of *Cain*, who slew his brother *Abel*, and the grievous punishment inflicted upon him for that crime. But *Rebekah* having been informed of his threats, in order to prevent the mischief, persuaded *Isaac* to send *Jacob* to *Padanaram*, to get a wife among his relations.

Accordingly *Jacob*, having received the direction and blessing of his father, set out upon his journey, and, at a place called *Luz*, in the land of *Canaan*, as he was sleeping in a field, with his head upon a stone, he dreamed, and saw a great ladder, which reached from earth to heaven: *and the angels of God ascended and descended upon it*. God himself appeared above the ladder, and promised to give him the land whereon he lay; that *He would be with him and keep him whithersoever he went: that his posterity should be numerous as the dust of the earth; and that all the families of the earth should be blessed through*



him ; the *Messiah*, or *Christ*, being to be born of one of his descendants.

Jacob, as soon as he awoke, with awful reverence and pious gratitude, set up the stone upon which he slept, and poured oil upon it, and called the name of the place *Bethel*, that is to say, *the House of God*. He then pursued his journey, till he arrived at the house of *Laban*, the brother of *Rebekah*, who entertained him with great kindness. *Laban* had two daughters, *Leah* and *Rachel*. *Jacob* soon showed a particular affection for the younger : and being desirous of marrying her, agreed with her father to take care of his flocks, as a shepherd, seven years for her. But, at the expiration of that time, *Laban*, by an artifice, obliged him to marry *Leah* ; and excused it by saying, *It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the first-born* : he promised, however, to give him *Rachel* also, *if he would serve him seven other years*. To this *Jacob* readily agreed, and took also *Rachel* to wife. In those days, because there were but few inhabitants in the world, men had more wives than one, and near relations were married to each other ; but as the world became more populous, this practice was reformed, and afterwards such marriages were forbidden.

The prudent and industrious management of *Jacob* was so favoured by Providence, that every thing which he took in hand prospered. His family also increased : he had twelve sons, and one daughter, called *Dinah* ; the two youngest sons, *Joseph* and *Benjamin*, were born of his beloved wife *Rachel*. Being desirous of making some provision for his children, he purposed to return to his father's house : but *Laban*, having experienced the good effects of *Jacob's* past care, engaged his further service by giving him a share of the cattle. After which the substance of *Jacob* increased exceedingly, so that he became master of many flocks and herds ;  *the hand of the diligent maketh rich*.—At length

perceiving that *Laban* was envious at his prosperity, and that *his countenance was not toward him as before*, he resolved to depart from him; and accordingly set out in a private manner with his family and all that he had. *Laban*, however, followed and overtook him; but after some expostulation, a covenant of peace was made between them, and they parted in friendship.

As *Jacob* pursued his way, he recollected the anger of his brother *Esau*, (who then lived at *Mount Seir*, in the land of *Edom*,) and therefore sent a kind conciliating message to him; but the messenger soon returned with the alarming news, that *Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men*. Being afraid of his brother's resentment, and being anxious for his tender family, he applied to Him *who alone is able to save*, and prayed earnestly for deliverance. The Almighty was pleased to give him a sign or token of the success of his prayer: for he sent an Angel, who wrestled with *Jacob*, and permitted him to prevail: upon which the angel said, *Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God, and with men also shalt thou prevail*. The word *Israel* literally signifies *a prince of God, or prevailing with God*.

Jacob divided his flock into several parts, and sent some before him, with instructions to his servants, that, upon meeting *Esau*, they should offer them as presents in his name, and speak in a gentle and respectful manner to him.  *A soft answer turneth away wrath*.—The heart of *Esau* was melted into peace and love by this kind and respectful conduct; he ran to meet *Jacob* with all the affection of a brother, embraced and kissed him; and after some friendly conversation they parted.  *When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him*.

Jacob journeyed to *Succoth*, and from thence to *Salem*, where he built an altar to God. While he


abode there, his daughter *Dinah*, out of a silly curiosity to see the young women of that country, and the fashions of the place, went to a great festival at *Shechem*; where her beauty captivated a young prince, named *Shechem*, who carried her away by force and defiled her. The young man, indeed, would afterwards have married her; but her brothers resented the injury to such a degree, as to kill *Shechem* and the men of the city, and to take the women and children captives. *Jacob* was grieved at this furious and cruel proceeding of his sons: and from an apprehension that the inhabitants of the land would revenge it upon his family, removed his habitation, and went, by the direction of God, to *Bethel*; and from thence to his father, to the city of *Hebron*, in the plain of *Mamre*; where, about fifteen years afterwards, *Isaac*, being one hundred and eighty years old, died, and was buried by his sons *Esau* and *Jacob*.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HISTORY OF JOSEPH.

Joseph was the favourite son of *Jacob*, because he was the eldest son of his dear *Rachel*; he loved him more than all his children. This partial affection of his father, and a dream which he related to his brothers, denoting that his condition in the world would be higher than theirs, made him the object of their envy and hatred. Therefore, one day, when they were feeding their flocks, and saw *Joseph* coming toward them, they cried out, *Here cometh the dreamer, let us kill him*. Being dissuaded, however, by *Reuben*, from shedding his blood, they stripped him and threw him into a pit; but seeing some merchants who were at that time providentially passing by into *Egypt*, they drew him up and sold him to them; after which they stained his coat with blood,

and carried it to *Jacob*, who concluded from thence that his son was devoured by a wild beast : and he put on sackcloth, and mourned for many days. *Joseph*, in the mean time, was carried into *Egypt* ; and sold to *Potiphar*, an officer of distinction under *Pharaoh* the king : where *the Lord made all that he did to prosper*, so that he found favour in the sight of his master, who made him overseer of his house, and put *all that he had into his hands*. But his blooming hopes of happiness were soon blasted ; for the wife of *Potiphar*, burning with impure desire, endeavoured to draw him into sin ; he was, however, too good to yield to her solicitations, and said to her, *How can I sin against God ?* And when she pressed him most earnestly, he resolutely fled from the temptation. Full of indignation at this contempt of her, she accused him falsely to her husband ; and *Potiphar*, too readily believing what she said, put him in prison. But the *Lord was with Joseph* in the dungeon ; and the keeper of it was so charmed with his good temper and patient behaviour, that he used him very courteously, and entrusted him with the care of the prisoners.

It happened that the chief baker and the chief butler of *Pharaoh*, who were in the same prison, dreamed each a dream ; and Joseph interpreted their dreamsto them ; foretelling that, at the expiration of three days, the baker would be hanged on a tree, and the butler be restored to his place. *Then*, added he to the butler, *think on me, and shew kindness, I pray thee, and take me out of this house*. As he had foretold, so it came to pass.  But pomp and pleasure are apt to divert the mind from the obligations of gratitude ; the butler, in the midst of his prosperity, forgot his poor friend, the interpreter, in prison.

Some time after, *Pharaoh* had two dreams : *he saw seven fat cows devoured by seven lean cows* ; and again, *he saw seven full ears of corn devoured by seven thin withered ears*. When the wise men of the country could not explain these dreams, the butler recollected


Joseph, and spake of him to the king : upon which he was sent for out of the prison, and the king related his dreams to him. *Joseph* immediately, by the assistance of God, informed *Pharaoh*, that the seven fat cows, and seven full ears, signified seven years of plenty, which would be in the land ; and the seven lean cows, and the seven lean ears, signified seven years of famine which would succeed them. *Let therefore Pharaoh appoint officers over the land, and let them gather corn in the seven plenteous years : and this food shall be for store against the seven years of famine.*

The king was astonished at the wisdom of *Joseph*, and, concluding justly from thence *that the Spirit of God was in him*, appointed him to this office, and gave him full power over his whole kingdom. The seven years of plenty came accordingly, and immense quantities of corn were laid up under his direction. Then the famine commenced ; and when the people cried out for bread, the store-houses were opened and the corn was sold to the *Egyptians* and the neighbouring nations.

The famine spread itself to *Canaan* : and *Jacob*, having been informed that there was corn in *Egypt*, though he little thought by whose hands it was disposed of, sent his sons thither, keeping only *Benjamin* at home. When they were presented to *Joseph*, they bowed themselves before him with their faces to the earth, in acknowledgment of his superiority, as had been foretold by his dream. He immediately knew them, but *made himself strange, and spake roughly to them*, accusing them *as spies who came to see the nakedness of the land*. Upon which they informed him, that they came from the land of *Canaan* ; that their father had twelve sons ; that one was dead, and the youngest was left at home. *Joseph* was dissatisfied with their report, and perhaps doubted whether *Benjamin* was really alive. *Hereby shall ye be proved*, said he ; *send one of you to fetch your brother, and the rest shall be kept in prison.*


Their present distress reminded them of their

former guilt; their inhuman treatment of their brother rushed into their minds, and, with self-condemning consciences, they said one to another, *We are verily guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.*


 Such is the conviction of every wicked man, when calamity overtakes him. Although he may for a time darken the light of conscience, (that *candle of the Lord* within us,) yet it can never be totally put out. Upon a sudden misfortune, or dangerous fit of sickness, the sense of guilt revives: and while the hand of God is felt, the justice of the punishment is acknowledged. Therefore *keep innocence, and do the thing that is right; for that, and that only, will bring a man peace at the last.*

Joseph, however, only detained *Simeon*, and dismissed the rest, with an order that they should bring *Benjamin* with them, when they returned. The relation of what had passed in *Egypt* filled the mind of *Jacob* with uneasy reflections and dreadful apprehensions: and, when his sons were obliged to go again for corn, it was with great difficulty that they persuaded him to let *Benjamin* go, not without repeated assurances that they would bring him back safe. They were immediately upon their arrival introduced to *Joseph*, who inquired tenderly after his father's welfare; but was so sensibly touched and affected at the sight of his brother *Benjamin*, that he was obliged to withdraw from them, lest his tears should discover him. He afterwards entertained them with great kindness, and distinguished *Benjamin* with particular marks of regard.

Joseph had privately commanded his steward to put his silver cup into *Benjamin's* sack; and the next morning when they were gone out of the city, they were followed and charged with ingratitude and robbery.—The cup was soon found: and the innocent *Benjamin* was carried back as a thief to *Joseph*. His brothers also returned in great asto-

nishment and affliction, and, prostrating themselves, entreated earnestly for his deliverance. *Joseph*, who was now fully satisfied of their sincere penitence, and their love of *Benjamin*, could refrain no longer : but, throwing his arms about their necks, said, *I am Joseph ; doth my father yet live ?* And, perceiving them to be deeply affected and troubled at his presence, he addressed them with the most kind and gentle expressions ; *Come near me, I pray you ; I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt ; but be not grieved that ye sold me into Egypt ; for God sent me before you to preserve life. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.*  Thus he endeavoured to comfort them ; to make them forget their past faults, and to speak peace to their minds. He then directed them to hasten to *Jacob*, to acquaint him that his son *Joseph* was lord of all *Egypt* ; and to bring him and his whole family into *Egypt*, that he might pay his duty to his aged father, and that they might all partake of the plenty which God had provided.

The heart of *Jacob* upon the return of his sons was filled with joy ; and he said, *It is enough (I desire nothing more in this world) ; Joseph my son is yet alive ; I will go and see him before I die.* He set out ; he arrived safe in *Egypt* ; but the pleasure of the interview between such an affectionate parent and such a dutiful son, is not to be described. *Joseph fell on his neck, and wept on his neck, a good while ; and Jacob said, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face.* *Jacob* and his family were settled in the land of *Goshen*, where they lived in great plenty ; and after some time, the good old man, having blessed his children, and foretold that the *Messiah* should descend from *Judah*, died in peace.

 What sentiments of piety and goodness arise in the heart upon considering the character of *Joseph* ! Patient under affliction ; honest and just in his stewardship ; resisting temptation and fleeing from it ; living under the fear of God, and supported by his

presence; rising from the lowest scene of disgrace and misery to the highest dignity; providing for the wants of the people; cherishing a spirit of forgiveness and brotherly love under the greatest injuries; and pouring plenty and comfort into the breast of his aged father.

There are also several circumstances, particularly his being hated by his brethren, his descending into the dungeon, and being raised to rule over *Egypt*, which, by their resemblance, naturally lead the mind to *Christ*; and though too much stress should not be laid upon such resemblances, yet they may be prudently used to direct the eye and heart to Him who is the end of the law and of all the Scriptures.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SLAVERY OF THE ISRAELITES, AND THE BIRTH OF MOSES.

THE sons of *Jacob* and their descendants, in process of time, multiplied so much that the land of *Goshen* was filled with them. They were called *Israelites*, from the surname of *Israel*, which God had given to *Jacob*; and sometimes they were called *Hebrews*, from *Heber*, one of their ancestors; and afterwards *Jews*, from *Judah*. But, after many years, the memory of *Joseph* and of his great services was lost; and a new king arose, who, instead of protecting the *Israelites*, was jealous of their increasing numbers and strength, and determined by all means to reduce them to a low state. He therefore employed them like slaves, in making bricks, and building cities; and made their lives bitter with hard bondage; but the more he afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew; at which he was so enraged, as to command that all their male infants should be destroyed as soon as they


were born. A certain *Hebrew* woman, how-
ever, called *Jochebed*, having been delivered
of a son, hid him for three months; and at
length, through fear of his being discovered and
slain, she laid him in a basket among the flags in
the river *Nile*; *Miriam*, the sister of the child,
was placed at a distance, to see what would become
of him.

The king's daughter soon came with her maid-servants to bathe in the river: and, having found the basket, was affected at the sight of the weeping infant, and melted into pity. *Miriam*, who had joined herself with the attendants, offered to call a nurse; and being sent for that purpose, ran with joy for *Jochebed*. So the infant was happily placed under the care of his own mother; and when he was sufficiently grown, was brought back to *Pharaoh's* daughter, who called him *Moses*, (which means *saved out of the water*,) and had him educated as her own son, in the knowledge and wisdom of the *Egyptians*.

Moses, when he was grown to manhood, turned his eye and heart from the honours of the court to the afflictions of his brethren. He therefore frequently visited and conversed with them; and one day, having observed an *Egyptian* doing wrong and injury to an *Hebrew*, he smote him and killed him. When *Pharaoh* heard this he sought to slay *Moses*: who, upon that account, fled to *Midian*, to *Jethro* the priest of that country; he afterwards married his daughter, and lived with him as keeper of his flocks.


After several years, as he was feeding the flocks near mount *Horeb*, he saw a bush flaming with fire, and yet not in the least consumed. While he stood in amazement at the strange sight, a voice issued from the place, saying, *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; I have seen the oppression of my people, and have heard their cry; and I will send thee to Pharaoh,*

that thou mayest lead them out of Egypt ; for I will bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey. *Moses* was no less astonished at what he heard, than at what he saw ; and expressed his fears at undertaking such an important and difficult enterprise, because he was a person of no authority or eloquence. But God exhorted him to be of good courage, and promised that he would be with him, and give him power to work miracles for the deliverance of his people ; and that *Aaron* his brother should go with him, as his speaker upon the occasion.


 When God in his providence appoints us to any important or arduous service, let us not plead inability, and *confer with flesh and blood* ; but immediately prepare ourselves to do it, and go on in the face of every possible discouragement, trusting in that comfortable promise, *My grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT.

Before Christ 1491. WHEN *Moses* and *Aaron* arrived at the land of *Goshen*, they acquainted the elders of *Israel* with what the Lord had spoken, and convinced them of the truth of it by some miracles which he had enabled them to perform. They then proceeded to *Pharaoh*, and in the name of the Lord required him to let the *Israelites* go into the wilderness, that they might hold a feast unto the Lord. *Pharaoh*, however, treated the message with contempt, and enjoined the task-masters to lay heavier burdens upon the people.—*Moses* and *Aaron* went again to the king, and, in order to prove the divine authority by which they acted, wrought some miracles before him ;  but the Lord hardened his heart, or rather permitted him to harden his

own heart; for God did not make him wicked, but by his own continued obstinate wickedness he brought this judgment of a hardened heart upon himself.—After this *Moses* and *Aaron* turned all the water of *Egypt* into blood, so that the fish died, and the rivers stank; and, seven days after, they brought a great plague of frogs, which covered the whole land, and swarmed even in the rooms and chambers of the king. *Pharaoh* seemed a little humbled, and entreated *Moses* to pray to God for relief, with a promise that he would permit the *Hebrews* to go and do sacrifice unto the Lord. But as soon as this plague, upon the prayer of *Moses*, was removed, he forgot the cause of it, and refused to fulfil his promise. The Lord punished his obstinacy and falsehood by sending great quantities of lice both upon man and beast: and afterwards swarms of pestilential flies, which corrupted the land. The king was so affected with these grievous calamities, as to apply to *Moses* for relief: the desired relief was granted: but still *Pharaoh* hardened his heart.

Then God sent a murrain among the cattle, of which they almost all died; then a sickness among the people, which covered their bodies with sore boils and ulcers; then dreadful storms of thunder, lightning, and hail, very grievous, such as *Egypt* had never suffered before; then he sent innumerable locusts, which devoured all the remaining fruits of the earth; and afterwards a thick heavy darkness, *which shut them up in their houses as prisoners, and fettered them with the bonds of a long night.* *Pharaoh* could not but feel these terrible effects of Divine vengeance, and yet he still went on sinning and repenting, and repenting and sinning; again he entreated *Moses*; again the plagues were removed; and again he hardened his heart.  How apt are men in the time of affliction to flee to God, as their only hope and refuge; and yet, upon deliverance from the danger, to forget their

Benefactor, and make no due acknowledgment for his mercies ! When distress and anguish take hold of them, they appear to be penitent, devout, and good ; but when their wishes are answered, and things go on smoothly, they see no further need of Divine assistance, *and their pious resolutions pass away like the early dew.* How base and ungenerous is that temper which is only to be driven by fear, and never to be won by goodness !


At last God sent down destruction upon the first-born of the *Egyptians* ; and there was a dreadful cry and confusion through the land : for *there was not a house in which there was not one dead.* Terrified and confounded at this dreadful instance of the power of God, and not knowing what might be the end of his anger, *Pharaoh* sent hastily for *Moses* and *Aaron*, and said, *Rise up, get you forth from among my people, both you and the children of Israel ; take your flocks also, and your herds, and go serve the Lord.* The *Egyptians*, indeed, were so affected with the plagues which God had sent, and so glad to get rid of the *Israelites*, that they made them many rich presents, and gave them whatever they desired.—This day was commanded by the Lord to be observed for ever by the *Israelites* as a solemn festival ; and to be called the *Passover* ; because, when he destroyed the first-born of the *Egyptians*, he *passed over the Israelites*, and also delivered them from their cruel and oppressive bondage.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF PHARAOH.

WHEN the *Israelites* had been gone some days' journey, *Pharaoh*, being informed that they intended to leave his kingdom, pursued them with a numerous army, in order to bring them back. But the Lord led his people, and protected them in a wonderful manner ; for *He went before them by day in*

a pillar of a cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light ; and thus they marched securely by day and night. Yet, when they were overtaken by *Pharaoh*, near the Red Sea, and found themselves, as it were, besieged by a great army behind, and the Red Sea before them, they distrusted the Divine power, and murmured against their leader. But *Moses*, at the command of God, stretched his hand over the sea, and immediately the waters were divided, and became as a wall on the right hand and on the left, so that there was a dry path for them, and they walked with safety to the other shore. *Pharaoh* and all the *Egyptians* pursued them in the same path ; but *Moses* again stretched out his hand, and the sea returned to its strength ; the waters rushed violently upon them, and not one of them escaped.

 *The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil ; my hand shall destroy them.*

Thou didst blow with thy wind, and the sea covered them : they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is like unto thee, O Lord ; glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders ?

The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WANDERING IN THE DESERT.

ALTHOUGH the *Israelites* had seen the great power of the Lord in the destruction of the *Egyptians*, and had joined in a song of thanksgiving for their deliverance, yet they were soon forgetful of his mercies, and within a few days being in want of water, upbraided their leader for having brought them out of *Egypt*. Their way to the land of *Canaan*, which God intended to give them, lay through a long wilderness ; and here, whenever


they were in distress or difficulties, instead of putting their trust in God, they murmured with impatience, and reproached *Moses*. The Almighty, however, manifested his power and goodness frequently in their favour ;—by sweetening the waters of *Marah* ;—by causing great quantities of quails to fall among them ;—by sending them bread from heaven, called *manna* ;—by bringing water out of a rock at *Rephidim* ;—and by giving them a complete victory over the *Amalekites*. Thus, by a continued course of miracles, he conducted them to *Mount Sinai*.

This mount was a part of the great mountain *Horeb*, on which *Moses* had attended *Jethro's* flocks ; but was distinguished, upon the return of *Moses*, by the name of *Sinai*, on account of the bush, which stood on it, in which the Lord had appeared unto *Moses* in a flame of fire.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAW GIVEN FROM MOUNT SINAI.

Before Christ 1491. THE *Israelites* had not long pitched their camp before *Mount Sinai*, when the glory of the Lord appeared upon the mountain with thunder, and lightning, and the sound of a trumpet ; and God, having called *Moses* to the top of the mount, made a covenant with the *Israelites*, that *if they would obey his voice, they should be a peculiar treasure unto him, above all people.* He then gave them the Ten Commandments, which contain the sum and substance of the *moral law*, written on stone ; *the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven on the table.*

 The First teaches, That there is but *one* God, and that we are to worship him alone, and have him for *our God*.

The Second teaches, That we are not to worship God in an un'worthy manner ; by bowing down to a picture or image, or making any representation of him ; and, consequently, that we are *to worship him in spirit and in truth.*

The Third forbids all oaths, not only perjury, but common swearing, and using the holy name of God upon trifling occasions, and without a becoming seriousness and reverence.

The Fourth directs us to rest from all labour, and lay aside all worldly business on the sabbath-day ; and to keep it holy by reading and meditation, by public and private prayer.

The Fifth, That we should honour and obey, love and comfort, our parents ; and behave with proper respect to all who have a lawful authority over us.

The Sixth, That we should not wilfully and unlawfully take away the life of any person, nor do any kind of hurt to others, nor bear any malice or hatred in our hearts ; but study, on the contrary, *to live peaceably with all men.*

The Seventh, That we should keep ourselves in temperance, soberness, and chastity, avoiding all *indeencies* of behaviour and conversation, and whatever has a tendency to corrupt and defile the mind.


The Eighth, That we should not deprive any person of his right and property, either by force or fraud, but should be just and honest in all our dealings, and give to every man his due.

The Ninth, That we should not injure the reputation of others, either by false evidence in a court of justice, or by slander, backbiting, and tale-bearing, in common conversation.

The Tenth forbids all unlawful *wishes* and unjust *desires* ; and is a fence and security to the other commandments, by directing us not to envy what others enjoy, but to be fully contented with our own state and circumstances.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and write all these Thy laws in our hearts, we beseech thee !

The Almighty was pleased to deliver also to *Moses* several directions for the better government of the people, and to establish what is called the *Ceremonial Law*. He commanded him to erect a tabernacle for public worship, and gave him particular instructions concerning the building, and the utensils thereof; concerning the office of High Priest, and the separation of the *Levites* for the performance of divine service, and concerning the burnt-offerings and sacrifices.


 There was a material difference between the *moral* and the *ceremonial* law: the former was far more excellent and valuable than the latter. The *moral* law is in its own nature good and excellent, and carries with it an intrinsic obligation; it is invariable, and must continue the same for ever. But the *ceremonial* law received all its efficacy, and all its power of obliging, merely from its being positively commanded; it was only of a temporary nature, and given to a peculiar people; it was the *shadow of things to come*, and to continue no longer than till the substance actually appeared.—The end and use of it was partly to distinguish the *Jews*, and, as it were, fence them against the idolatry of the neighbouring nations: partly by their purifications and washings to remind them of purity of heart, and oblige them more strongly to the practice of all moral duties; but chiefly, by their offerings and sacrifices, to cherish a lively faith and hope in that great Deliverer, *whose soul should be made an offering and sacrifice for sin*. The law was a school-master to the *Jews* to bring them unto Christ.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WANDERING IN THE DESERT CONTINUED.

When Moses had delayed for several days to come down out of the mount, (for he continued there forty


days and nights,) the people required *Aaron* to make them some gods; and they prevailed upon him to form a golden calf, as a god for them, to be the object of their worship, and their guide and conductor.

 How weak and blamable was *Aaron* in yielding to the importunity of the people, and becoming a partaker of their sin! Yet, alas, how apt are we all to give way to the humour and opinion of the company we keep, even against the light of our minds, and the conviction of our consciences! *The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.*—As they were paying adoration to their new idol, and singing and dancing round it, *Moses* came down from the mountain: and was so exceedingly moved with anger at their behaviour, that he threw down the tables of the law, which he had in his hand, and brake them. He then destroyed the image; and commanded the sons of *Levi* to slay those who had been principally guilty of this idolatry. He afterwards returned to the Lord, and made intercession for *Aaron* and the people: the Lord was pleased to forgive their wickedness, and commanded *Moses* to write the Ten Commandments on two tables of stone.

The people, however, soon gave way to the natural corruption of their hearts; they offended God again and again, and many of them suffered the just effect of their obstinacy and impiety. *Nadab* and *Abihu* were consumed by fire from heaven, for disregarding the fire of the Lord upon the altar, and bringing common fire into the tabernacle, *which he commanded them not.*—Many were destroyed at a place called *Taberah* (that is, *a burning*, because *the fire of the Lord burnt amongst them*) on account of their impatient repinings. Many died of a plague at *Kibroth Hattaavah*, (that is, *the graves of lust*,) because they complained of their food, and *lusted for flesh to eat*. One man was stoned for *blasphemy*; another was stoned for

breaking the Sabbath; and *Miriam* was stricken with leprosy for murmuring against *Moses*.

When they had proceeded farther in the wilderness, and drew near to *Canaan*, *Moses* sent twelve men to take a view of the land and its inhabitants; who brought back an evil report, saying, "*The land eateth up the inhabitants thereof, and all the people are giants, and we were in our own sight but as grasshoppers.*" The *Israelites* were so disheartened and terrified with this account, that they again reproached *Moses*, and resolved to go back into *Egypt*. God was highly displeased with them for this contumacy and hardness of heart; and declared that, for a punishment, they should wander in the wilderness forty years, and that none of the people who were above twenty years of age, except *Joshua* and *Caleb*, should go into the land of *Canaan*,—the land flowing with milk and honey, and abounding with all good things.

 They were distrustful of that power and goodness which had been so often and so wonderfully manifested in their favour; and despaired of getting possession of that land, which God had promised to give them. So it is with us in our way to the heavenly *Canaan*; our lusts are the enemies which oppose our entrance; and we are apt, like the *Israelites*, to look upon them as giants, and upon ourselves as grasshoppers. But *be strong in the Lord, and go forth in the power of his might*; in cheerful dependence on his victorious aid, bid defiance to all your enemies, and labour with renewed diligence and vigour to *enter into the complete and eternal rest of God, that you may not fall after the same example of unbelief and disobedience.*

Afterwards *Korah*, one of the heads of a tribe, and many other persons of considerable dignity, upbraided *Moses* and *Aaron* for *lifting themselves above the congregation*, and excluding others from any share of honour and power; and attempted, by a seditious tumult, to deprive them of their autho-

city, and to take the priesthood upon themselves. But their rebellion was punished in a wonderful manner: *for the earth opened under them, and they, and all that belonged to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them.*

The *Israelites* then wandered up and down from place to place, and in the sandy deserts of *Kadesh* they murmured for water. *Moses* therefore struck a rock, and it poured forth streams before them: but upon this occasion *Moses* and *Aaron* neglected to give the glory of the miracle to God, and assumed the honour and power of it in some degree to themselves, at which God was so highly offended, that he declared that they should not enter the land of *Promise*.

From thence the people journeyed to *Mount Hor*, where *Aaron* died; and being refused by the king of *Edom* to pass through his country, and being in want of provisions, they again rebelled against *Moses*: for which crime God sent fiery serpents among them, by whose bites many were destroyed; but upon their humility and repentance, he commanded *Moses* to hang a brazen serpent upon a cross; and the wounded persons, by looking upon it, were healed.

What a lively emblem was this of Him who offered himself a sacrifice upon the cross; and upon beholding whom, with true repentance and faith, the wounded conscience obtains pardon and peace!

After several marches, and encampments, they arrived at *Pisgah*, and having gained several victories over the *Amorites*, proceeded to the plains of *Moab*. *Balak*, the king of *Moab*, terrified at their approach, sent for the prophet *Balaam* to curse them in a solemn manner; but when he came, the prophetic Spirit of God overruled his intentions, and caused him to bless them.

At length *Moses*, being one hundred and twenty years old, and knowing that the time of his death drew near, set before the

Before Christ 1452.
Before Christ 1451.

people the repeated mercies and commands of God, and exhorted and pressed them, both by promises and threatenings, to a faithful and constant obedience. After which, having taken (from the top of *Mount Pisgah*) a view of the country of *Canaan*, which the Lord had promised to the posterity of *Abraham*, and which they were soon to take possession of, he died in peace, and was translated into the heavenly *Canaan*, that better country, where are rivers of pleasure, and joys for evermore.

- 71 - CHAPTER XXI.

THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN BY JOSHUA.


UPON the death of *Moses*, God appointed *Joshua* to be commander and judge over the *Israelites*, and to conduct them into the land of *Canaan*: and, as no less than the Divine aid could support him in such a difficult undertaking, the Almighty endued him with strength and wisdom equal to the work, and encouraged him with this gracious promise, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* Every sincere Christian may apply these words to himself, and in the midst of the greatest fears and dangers, not only *trust* but even *boast* in the Divine presence and protection, *boldly saying, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do unto me; for God hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

Joshua, having learnt the state of the country, and the disposition and strength of the inhabitants, by two spies whom he sent to *Jericho*, the first city on the other side of the river *Jordan*, led the army to the bank of the river; and the priests, by Divine direction, went before the people, bearing the *Ark of the Covenant*. The ark was a small chest, or coffer, overlaid with gold; the lid or cover of which was called the *Mercy-seat*, being considered as the place

of God's special and gracious presence. It was called *the Ark of the Covenant*, because it was a symbol or representation of the covenant made between God and his people; and contained the two tables of the law, which they were required on their part to fulfil.—God was pleased to confirm the authority of *Joshua* at *Jordan*, as he had before confirmed the authority of *Moses* at the *Red Sea*; for, as soon as the feet of the priests touched the extremity of the river, the current was stopped; the dry ground appeared; and the people passed over in safety.

Joshua immediately laid siege to *Jericho*; and after a solemn procession of the army, with the priests bearing the ark, round the city once a day for seven days, the walls of it suddenly fell down flat to the ground; so that the *Israelites* entered and took possession of the place without any difficulty. The Lord had commanded them utterly to destroy all the people of the land, on account of their gross idolatry and monstrous wickedness, and thus to make them a monument of his just displeasure and hatred against sin; they therefore put all the inhabitants to the sword, and spared not a living creature, except *Rahab* and her family, who had entertained the spies, and obtained from them a promise of safety.

As soon as *Joshua* had restored order to the camp, after the destruction of *Jericho*, he sent three thousand men against the city *Ai*, where they met with an unexpected repulse, on account of the impiety of *Achan*, who, contrary to the express direction of God, had taken and concealed a rich garment and a wedge of gold, part of the plunder of *Jericho*.

 *Take heed and beware of covetousness.*—The treachery, however, being discovered, and the people sanctified by the punishment of the offender, they again attacked the city and took it. Upon this the neighbouring kings were alarmed, and

joined their forces together; but the *Gibeonites*, fearful of the event, sent messengers to *Joshua*, and by a stratagem obtained an alliance with him. He afterwards defeated the army of the *Canaanites*, and put the confederate kings to death. The power of God was remarkably displayed upon that occasion: for, during the flight of the enemy, the clouds were converted into very large hail-stones, by which more were destroyed than by the sword; the sun and the moon also stood still, and the day was considerably lengthened, so that the zeal of the *Israelites* was not obstructed in the pursuit and slaughter of their adversaries.

Thus *the Lord God fought for Israel*, and led them on to successive victories, till the *Canaanites* were almost wholly subdued. Then *Joshua* applied himself, by the direction of God, to the division of the land; an exact survey of it having been taken, each tribe had a possession by lot: and the land so allotted was divided among the several families of the tribe, according to the number of persons belonging to it. The tribe of *Levi*, indeed, had no share or portion in the division of the land: because, being chosen by the Lord to be his priests and ministers, to preserve knowledge and preach the law, they were to be intermixed for that purpose with the other tribes, and to be supported by tithes and the offerings of the altar.

Joshua governed the *Israelites* in peace and prosperity about seventeen years after their establishment in *Canaan*: when, finding himself drawing towards his end, he assembled all the heads of the tribes before the Lord; and, having reminded them, in a very pathetic speech, of the many wonderful mercies which God had bestowed upon them and their fathers, and shewed them how much it was their interest, as well as duty, to persevere in the pure worship of the Deity, and the faithful observance of his laws, he exhorted them to renew their covenant with God, in such a

solemn manner as might fix a lasting impression upon their hearts. To which they all cheerfully assented, and engaged themselves by the most sacred protestations and promises, declaring publicly, *The Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey.*

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HISTORY OF THE JUDGES.

THERE is no express record that any particular person immediately succeeded *Joshua* in the title and power of *Judge of Israel*: yet there is great reason to apprehend that *Caleb* acted in that great character, who, at the head of the tribe of *Judah*, gained many victories over the neighbouring nations; several other tribes also gained great advantages over those people near whom they were planted. The Lord, however, did not entirely drive out the *Canaanites*; but, on account of the disobedience of the *Israelites*, suffered some to remain, as instruments of their chastisement, declaring to them, *They shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.*


Accordingly, indeed, by conversing with the heathens and intermarrying with them, (which they were forbidden to do,) they soon forgot the Lord God, who had done such great things for them, and served the gods of those countries, called *Baalim*. The word *Baal* signifies *Lord*: these false gods were generally worshipped upon high places, which were full of trees and shady groves. How should we learn from the example of the *Jews* to avoid the company of the wicked and profane; for *evil communication corrupts good manners*. —In consequence of their idolatry and wickedness,

the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, and they were much harassed and perplexed with internal calamities and foreign enemies.

Before
Christ
1406. *Micah, of the tribe of Ephraim, had so far degenerated from true religion, as to set up images in his own house for worship, excusing himself on account of his distance from Shiloh, where the tabernacle was placed: he had prevailed likewise upon a Levite to dwell with him, and perform religious offices, but the Danites, having accidentally discovered the priest and the images, carried them away, and pursued the same idolatrous worship.—About this time also the people of Gibeah, of the tribe of Benjamin, were guilty of horrid barbarity to one of the Levites and his wife; and their brethren, instead of giving up the offenders to punishment, when they were demanded by the other tribes, protected them: upon which a bloody war ensued, and the Benjamites were almost totally destroyed.*

The Lord also suffered the people to fall an easy conquest into the hands of the king of *Mesopotamia*, who exacted a heavy tribute from them for eight years: but, upon their repentance and crying to him for help, he raised up *Othniel*, the son-in-law of *Caleb*, to be their Judge, who defeated their enemies, and gave them peace and tranquillity for forty years. After the death of *Othniel*, Before
Christ
1325. *the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord*, who for that reason reduced them into subjection to the *Moabites*, till they turned unto him with humility and penitence: upon which he recovered them from their slavery by the hands of *Ehud*. After him, *Shamgar*, a man of singular strength and valour, made a great slaughter of the *Philistines*, who had invaded their territories; and he wrought out their deliverance. These warnings, however, had but little effect; they again offended God, and were therefore exposed to the oppression of *Jabin*, king of *Canaan*, for many years;


but when they were brought to a sense of their impiety, he set them free by *Deborah*, who judged *Israel*: for *Barak*, under her direction, defeated a numerous army commanded by *Sisera*: and *Jael* killed *Sisera* by driving a nail into his temples.

While they enjoyed the fruits of this deliverance in peace and plenty, they ungratefully forgot their almighty Deliverer, and fell again into idolatry and sin.  This was generally their case, and is indeed the case of many: in the time of danger and distress, they see their folly and humble themselves before the *Lord*; but in the time of prosperity they become careless and profane, and their language is, *Who is the Lord, that we should obey his voice?*—For their repeated crimes they were brought into miserable bondage under the *Midianites*, till upon their repentance an Angel called *Gideon* from the threshing-floor, to be judge of *Israel*, who performed many glorious actions, and not only freed them from their enemies, but also restored them to a flourishing condition, and led them from idolatry to the true worship of God. At his death, *Abimelech*, one of his sons, Before having slain all his brothers, except *Jotham*, Christ persuaded the *Shechemites* to make him king. 1236.

This occasioned some civil dissensions among the people: but after three years, as he was besieging a city, he was slain. *Tola*, the next judge, governed the state for twenty-three years, with prudence and success: but, during the administration of his successor, *Jair*, the people rejected the worship of their own God, their almighty Friend and Benefactor, and adopted and served the gods of all the neighbouring nations. The *Philistines* and *Ammonites* were therefore stirred up against them, and invaded them on every side. Upon which the *Israelites*, in great consternation and despair, ran to the Deity whom they had offended, and earnestly implored his protection and succour: but he said unto them, *Go and cry unto the gods which ye*



have chosen : let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation: Yet, upon their humble confession before and repentance, he raised up *Jephthah*, to be Christ their judge and deliverer. *Jephthah* was a 1188. man of great courage and power ; he defeated and drove out the *Ammonites*, invaded their land, destroyed many of their cities, and revived the liberty and glory of *Israel*. But he blasted his own glory, and embittered all his days, by one act of indiscretion and rashness ; for, before he took the field against the enemy, he made a vow, that if he should return victorious, he would offer unto the Lord whatever came first out of his house to meet him. Unhappily his daughter, impatient to see her father again, ran out first to embrace him ; and the afflicted parent thought himself obliged to *do unto her according to his vow.*

There is reason to believe that the victim of this rash vow was not offered as a human sacrifice to God ; because such sacrifices were expressly forbidden by the law, as odious and detestable in his sight ; and *Jephthah* must have known that no oath can be binding and obligatory, where the matter of it is clearly unlawful. The words also may be understood in a more favourable sense, as implying only that she was *to be the Lord's*, that is, to be devoted wholly to the service of God, and to lead a single recluse life. The discharge of the vow, however, according to this mild construction, must have occasioned great anxiety and grief to *Jephthah*, because thus he secluded his beloved daughter from all society ; he was deprived for ever of her company ; and, as she was his only child, could have no expectation of any posterity to inherit his fortune, and perpetuate his name.

 *Vows* are not to be made without great caution and deliberation. When we presume, as it were, to make bargains with God, and engage concerning temporal affairs, that if *He* will do such a thing for *us*, we will do such a thing for *Him* : we

do but *tempt God*, and lay a snare for ourselves.—All vows, however, which are formed merely to bring us nearer to God, and oblige us to a more steadfast obedience, are not only lawful, but prudent and expedient. We should endeavour to bind our treacherous hearts to him with the most solemn ties, and firmly resolve to be and to do nothing but what is agreeable to his will. Particularly every Christian should seriously reflect upon his *baptismal vow*, and frequently renew that covenant with God in the sacred ordinance appointed by *Him*, through whose mediation our sincere, though imperfect obedience, will be accepted—even Jesus Christ.

After *Jephthah*, *Ibzan*, and *Elon*, and *Abdon* successively judged *Israel*, of whom nothing remarkable is recorded. God then, in an extra-ordinary manner, raised a deliverer, named *Samson*. His birth was miraculous, and ^{Before Christ, 1155.} foretold by an angel; and he was endowed with an uncommon degree of strength. He rent a lion as he would have rent a kid. He killed a thousand *Philistines* with the jaw-bone of an ass: and, being shut up in the city *Gaza*, carried off the large heavy gates, and escaped. He became a slave, however, to sensual pleasure, and was at length persuaded, by the artifices of a treacherous woman, named *Delilah*, to discover the fatal secret concerning his strength, that it consisted in his hair.

 *The lips of a wicked woman drop as a honey-comb, and she flattereth with her words: but her end is bitter as wormwood, and her feet go down to death.*—*Delilah* soon took an opportunity, while he was sleeping, of cutting off his hair, and delivering him into the hands of the *Philistines*, who confined him in prison and put out his eyes.  The gifts and advantages with which God distinguished the judges and others, according to the exigences of his people, did not exempt them from human frailties: they might be furnished with miraculous.

endowments, and yet fall short of those moral graces and virtues which are the objects of his special favour. Many will plead in the last awful day, *Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name done many wonderful works?* to whom, however, he will answer, *Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.*

When *Samson* had passed some months in miserable servitude, (in which time his hair was grown again, and his strength returned,) he was brought forth by the *Philistines*, upon a great festival, as an object of their mockery and scorn. Full of indignation at this insult, he cried unto the Lord for help, that he might be avenged for the loss of his eyes; and having taken hold of the pillars of the house, in which the princes and nobles were assembled, with many others, he bowed himself with all his might; upon which the house fell, and *Samson* and the *Philistines* were buried together in the ruins.


Eli, the high-priest, succeeded as judge; who, though of good disposition, was very indolent and remiss in the government both of the nation and his own family. His two sons, *Hophni* and *Phinehas*, who officiated under him, were guilty of the most infamous crimes; and by their example led the people, who were naturally prone to wickedness, into the greatest abominations. *Because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*, the Lord threatened to take the priesthood from his house, and to destroy his family. Not long after this, the *Philistines* attacked and defeated the *Israelites*; *Hophni* and *Phinehas* were slain, and the ark of the covenant, which had been brought into the camp in order to encourage the people, and terrify the enemy, was taken.—God suffered that special token of his presence to be removed from his people, because their minds were estranged from him, and *he was not in all their thoughts*.—*Eli* was impatient to know the event of the battle; and as soon as he heard, not only that his sons were slain,

but also that the ark was taken away, he fell backward from his seat and died.

The *Philistines* carried the holy ark to the ^{Before} city *Ashdod*, and set it in the house of *Dagon* ^{Christ} their god: but the vain image fell upon his ^{1116.} face before the ark, as it were in obeisance; and God sent a severe affliction and plague among the people, so that they gladly sent it back to the *Israelites*, who placed it in the house of *Abinadab* in Gibeah.

Samuel, who had been dedicated to the Lord in a remarkable manner, and bred up under *Eli* from his infancy, succeeded to the government, and acted both as prophet and judge. He was favoured by the Almighty with frequent revelations of his will: he preached to the people with great affection and zeal, and prevailed on them to put away their strange gods, to confess their sins, and to serve the Lord alone. He was also a wise and vigilant magistrate; he administered justice with great impartiality, and took a circuit yearly through the kingdom for that purpose. But when he grew old and incapable of discharging his public office, *he made his sons judges over Israel*, who degenerated from their father's virtue, perverted justice for the sake of bribes, and oppressed the people: upon which the elders of *Israel* made a general complaint to *Samuel*, and earnestly requested him to alter their form of government, and to appoint a *king to judge them like other nations*.

Samuel, by the particular direction of the Lord, set before them the many inconveniences and grievances which would attend such a change; and also informed them, that, by thus insisting upon it, they rejected the Lord from being their king: yet when, notwithstanding the remonstrance of the prophet, they persisted obstinately in their demand, God ordered him to hearken to their voice, and was pleased to nominate *Saul* to the regal dignity.

 We know not what temporal advantages

are most conducive to our real interest; and frequently, with equal eagerness and ignorance, solicit those things which would be pernicious to us. God alone knows what will help us, and what will hurt us; and all our prayers should be offered, as with entire dependence on his *goodness*, so with entire submission to his *wisdom*. *Give us, O Lord, the things which are most convenient for us, whether we desire them or not; and keep from us, we beseech thee, all evil things, even though we should wish and earnestly pray for them.*

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

WHILE the *Israelites* were governed by judges, the land was afflicted with a grievous famine; during which, *Elimelech*, a man of *Bethlehem*, retired for safety, with his wife *Naomi*, and his two sons, into the land of *Moab*; where his sons married *Orpah* and *Ruth*. But, after some time, he and his sons died, upon which *Naomi* resolved to return into her own country, and desired her daughters-in-law to remain in *Moab*, under the care and protection of their own relations.—*Orpah*, with great reluctance and many tears, took leave of her mother, and remained; but *Ruth* clave unto her, saying, *Whither thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.*

Upon their arrival at *Bethlehem*, *Ruth* went into the fields of *Boaz* to glean corn for their food. *Boaz*, though abounding in riches, was diligent, condescending, and charitable. Observe the behaviour of the master and the servants: as he went into the field, *he said to the reapers, the Lord be with you; and they answered him, The Lord bless thee.* Having inquired into the family and circumstances of *Ruth*, whom he saw gleaning, he commanded the men to let fall some handfuls in her way; con-

triving at the same time to give her a plentiful provision without the appearance of giving, and to save her that shame and confusion which modest people feel upon receiving.

Boaz was so charmed with the honest industry of *Ruth*, and her dutiful affection to *Naomi*, that after a fruitless application to her kinsmen for a husband, he himself married her, and they had a son called *Obed*, who was the father of *Jesse*, and grandfather of *David*; from whom in a direct line the Saviour of the world descended, and is therefore called the *Son of David*.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE REIGN OF SAUL.

Saul, a young man, as he was looking for his father's asses, which had strayed from their pasture, was directed by the Lord to *Samuel*, and anointed to be king over *Israel*. He was no sooner seated upon his throne, than the men of *Jabesh-gilead*, being closely besieged by the *Ammonites*, implored his assistance; upon which he immediately collected some forces, marched all night, attacked and defeated the enemy, and put them to flight with a very considerable loss.

After this, *Jonathan*, the son of *Saul*, took a garrison from the *Philistines*; who were so much enraged at it, that they marched against the *Israelites* with a very numerous army. The people were filled with consternation and despair; and *Saul*, though he had been commanded by *Samuel* to wait for his coming, yet hoping to raise the drooping spirits of his subjects, offered the burnt-offering himself; for which act of presumption the prophet sharply rebuked him, and told him that *his kingdom would not continue*. The Lord was pleased, however, in compassion to the people, to favour the arms of *Jonathan*, and grant a remarkable victory over the enemy.

Saul was afterwards sent to execute judgment upon the *Amalekites*, with an express command *not to leave any creature alive*. But he obeyed the command only in part; for he saved *Agag* their king, and the best of the cattle; and when *Samuel*, upon hearing the *bleating of the sheep, and the lowing of the oxen*, charged him with the failure, he pretended that he had saved the cattle for a sacrifice unto the Lord.

☞ There can be no good excuse for the wilful violation of our duty. Can we be said to do the will of God, while we do it only in some particular instances, and knowingly neglect it in others? Can a *partial* obedience be justified in the sight of God, or to our own hearts?—Could those spoils, which the Almighty had commanded to be destroyed, be a *pleasing sacrifice* to him;—or an external ceremony make amends for the breach of an express law?—Certainly not. The prophet, therefore, rejected the hypocritical defence, and said, *Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.—Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.*

☞ True religion consists in doing the will of God with sincerity of heart. We must renounce, not only this or that sin, but all sin; and must obey not only this or that command, but all the commands of God, without exception or reserve. *Then shall I not be ashamed*, then shall I have confidence in thy favour and loving kindness, *when I have respect unto all thy commandments*. *Saul* was deeply affected with the denunciation of *Samuel*. The loss of the Divine favour was attended with great perplexity and horror; *there is no peace to the wicked*, saith the Scripture. In this unhappy situation, he was advised to try the power of music, in order to divert his thoughts, and lull his mind to rest. For this purpose, *David*, a shepherd, the son of *Jesse*, who was famous for playing skilfully upon


the harp, and singing hymns, was recommended to him ; and his music was so excellent that it charmed the passions of the king, and in a great measure removed his disorder.

The *Philistines* returned with recruited forces against *Israel* ; and when both armies were encamped near each other, *Goliath*, a giant, day after day, challenged any of the *Israelites* to decide the war by a single combat : but he was of such a prodigious stature, that the soldiers of *Saul* were terrified at the sight of him, and shrank back from the encounter. Young *David*, however, who came in the mean time to visit his brothers in the camp, as soon as he heard his insulting language, was moved with indignation, and resolved to fight the gigantic champion. For he trusted in the Almighty, (by whose assistance he had formerly slain both a lion and a bear, which had assaulted his flocks,) that he would also deliver into his hand this proud *Philistine*, who had reproached and defied the armies of the living God.

The *Israelites* stood in amazement, and trembled for the adventurous stripling, who went forward with only a sling in his hand, and a few pebble stones in his shepherd's bag. *Goliath*, on the other hand, treated him with insolent disdain, and threatened to give his flesh to the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. But *David*, guided and supported by an invisible power, slang a stone, which penetrated the head of his adversary, so that he fell upon his face to the earth. At the sight of which the *Israelites*, exulting with joy, attacked the army of the dismayed *Philistines*, and obtained a complete victory over them.

The admiration and applause expressed by all the people in honour of *David* excited sentiments of envy and jealousy in the breast of *Saul*. What a wretched temper it is, to be miserable upon those occasions which ought to give pleasure and delight ; and to hate others for those excellences which

should recommend them to our love!—This malignant disposition, by degrees, so far prevailed over *Saul*, that he resolved to destroy *David*: but *Jonathan*, whose soul was knit with the soul of *David* in friendship, informed him of his danger, and advised him to flee from the anger of his father. *David* therefore retired from his dominions to *Gath*, a city of the *Philistines*; where, being discovered, and in danger of his life, he pretended to be mad. Having escaped by this artifice, he fled to *Adullam*, where many of his relations and friends, and others of broken fortunes and discontented minds, resorted to him. He could not find, however, any rest or dwelling-place; for *Saul*, as it were, hunted him upon the mountains, and pursued him whithersoever he went.

It happened once, that *Saul*, being alone, entered into a cave where *David* and some friends had concealed themselves. The companions of *David* pressed him to put an end to all his distresses, by the death of his unjust persecutor; to which he mildly answered, *God forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against the Lord's anointed.*  A good man will not take any unlawful advantage of his enemy; nor seek deliverance from danger by such methods as are inconsistent with the will of God. *Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: pray for them that persecute you.* When *Saul* was gone out of the cave, *David* called after him, and expostulated with him concerning the unreasonableness of his hatred against a man who had never done him any injury; and who, having that day had it in his power to avenge himself, had yet spared his life. *Saul* was melted into tenderness with this undeserved generosity and goodness, and, laying aside his anger, returned to *Jerusalem* in peace.

Near the place of *David's* residence lived *Nabal*, a man abounding in flocks and herds; but brutal and churlish in his temper. *David*, who, by keeping his men under strict discipline, protected the

cattle of this man from plunderers, sent messengers to him at the time of sheep-shearing, requesting some provisions. The selfish *Nabal*, however, not only refused, but treated the messengers rudely, and spoke reproachfully of *David* himself; who was so offended with the ingratitude and inhumanity of the man, that he threatened to destroy him and his family. But *Abigail*, the wife of *Nabal*, a woman of a beautiful person and gentle disposition, carried a rich supply of provision to *David*; and with her presents and soft persuasive words appeased his indignation, and prevented the shedding of blood. In a short time *the Lord smote Nabal that he died*; and afterwards *David* invited *Abigail* to come to him, and he married her.

The anger and hatred of *Saul* soon revived: he ungratefully forgot the generosity of *David* in sparing his life in the cave, and marched against him with three thousand men into the wilderness of *Ziph*. There *David* had another opportunity of killing *Saul*, and putting the crown upon his own head: for, going to view the camp, he entered into the tent of *Saul* while he was sleeping; but his piety prevailed over his interests, and he only carried away a spear, and a pitcher of water, as tokens of the king's danger, and of his own innocence. As soon as *Saul* was apprized of what had passed, he acknowledged the superior virtue and generosity of *David*, promised not to make any further attempt upon his life, and, having blessed him, returned to his own city.

After a few years, *Saul* was reduced to a very deplorable condition; he was attacked by an army of the *Philistines*, far superior in number and strength to the forces of *Israel*, which he drew out against them; and when he inquired of the Lord concerning the event, the Lord gave him no answer. This filled him with the utmost perplexity and terror: *he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled*; for he well knew that there could be no

success without the favour and assistance of God. A battle, however, soon ensued: the engagement between the armies was very sharp and violent. *Jonathan*, and two of his brothers, supported the fight, with great courage; but, being at length overpowered and slain, all was disorder and confusion, and the *Israelites* fled. *Saul* himself also fled; and, on mount *Gilboa*, being fatigued and wounded, and fearful of falling into the hands of the enemy, he threw himself upon his sword and died.


David lamented, with unfeigned sorrow, the death of *Saul* and *Jonathan*, in these pathetic words: *The beauty of Israel is slain; how are the mighty fallen! Ye mountains of Gilboa, let their be no dew upon you: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, even the shield of Saul. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!*

CHAPTER XXV.

THE REIGN OF DAVID.

Before Christ 1055. *David*, who had been privately anointed king by *Samuel*, was directed by God, upon the death of *Saul*, to remove to *Hebron*; where the tribe of *Judah* anointed him to be their king; while *Abner*, *Saul's* general, and the other tribes, proclaimed *Ishbosheth*, the remaining son of *Saul*, king over *Israel*. An open war soon commenced between the two rival princes, which continued for several years, till *Ishbosheth* was barbarously murdered by two of his own captains; after which the conspirators, with full dependence upon a gracious reception, fled to *David* with the news; but, though the event was advantageous to him, that good prince detested the bloody fact, and commanded the authors of it to be put to death.

The heads of all the tribes immediately submitted to the authority of *David*, and anointed him king over *Israel*.

21. Inspired with a grateful sense of the numberless and various instances of Divine goodness, *which had taken him from the sheepcot, and made him ruler over Israel*; it was his study and delight to promote the glory and worship of God, and to discharge the important duties of that station to which he had been so wonderfully raised. He brought the ark of the Lord from the house of *Abinadab* to *Jerusalem*, in a solemn triumphant procession, with music and songs of joy. He was also desirous of building a stately temple to the Lord, as a place of public worship; but the Almighty sent *Nathan* the prophet to inform him, that though his intention was highly acceptable, yet the execution of it should be reserved for his son, whom God would establish in the kingdom, and bless with prosperity and peace.  Men are apt to be offended, if their good intentions are not carried into execution at their own time, and in their own manner; but all our designs should be formed and pursued with submission to Providence, and we should cheerfully sacrifice our private wishes to the will and glory of God. The fervent zeal of *David* was not extinguished or abated by the Divine prohibition; though the pious and honourable work was deferred to adorn the reign of his son, yet he applied great care and diligence in making preparations for it; and immense quantities of gold, silver, and brass, which he obtained both by conquest and by commerce, were dedicated to the Lord, and laid up for that sacred purpose. He reigned happily *over all Israel, and executed judgment and justice unto all his people; and the Lord was with him, and preserved him whithersoever he went*. The friendly affection which *Jonathan* had shown to him was still fresh in his mind; and having made diligent inquiry after his family, and found *Mephibosheth* his son alive, he

restored to him all the possessions of his father, and placed him constantly at his table. ¶ Gratitude is the certain fruit of a good and generous heart; and the satisfaction arising from the exercise of it proves experimentally, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive.*

¶ But, alas, what is man! what are even good men! their best dispositions, their strongest resolutions, how uncertain and changeable!—We have an alarming instance of it in *David*, who suffered impure desires to get possession of his heart, and then gave himself up to the indulgence of them. Captivated with the beauty of *Bathsheba*, he took her to his own house: after which he caused her husband, *Uriah*, to be slain, and married her. The prophet *Nathan*, being sent by God to bring him to a sense of his guilt, addressed him with the pretended story of a rich man, who, upon the coming of a stranger, had spared his own numerous flocks, and taken away the favourite lamb of a poor neighbour. The king immediately condemned the rich man for his injustice and cruelty: but soon found that he had pronounced sentence against himself, for *Nathan* said unto him, *Thou art the man!* for the lamb was the wife of *Uriah*. Upon this home-attack, his sleeping conscience was roused; his mind was filled with remorse; and the heartfelt confusion of his crime burst forth in this honest confession, *I have sinned against the Lord:* and so sincere and effectual was his repentance, that *Nathan* instantly replied, *The Lord also hath put away thy sin.* ¶ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord: for he is gracious and merciful, and forgiveth iniquity, transgression, and sin.

The last years of his life were embittered by private and public calamities: his son *Absalom*, having in a great degree stolen the affections of his people from his aged father, broke out into open rebellion,

and obliged him to flee from *Jerusalem*: but the rebels were soon defeated, and the young prince, as he fled upon a mule, was caught by his hair in the boughs of a thick oak, and suspended between heaven and earth, till *Joab*, *David's* general, slew him. After which the people resorted to the king with great submission and zeal: yet growing jealous, on account of the partial regard which he shewed for his own tribe, they revolted against him under *Sheba*; but they were soon overpowered, and public peace was restored.

While *David* was enjoying the sweets of peace and prosperity, he was desirous, out of vain-glory, and a foolish curiosity, to know the number and strength of his subjects, and commanded *Joab* to take an account of all the people. For this act of pride and arrogance, and for the wickedness of the people in general, God sent a dreadful pestilence, which in a short time destroyed seventy thousand persons; and the devastation was still increasing, when God in his mercy heard the prayers of the penitent king, and put an end to the calamity.


At length *David*, being about seventy years of age, and sensible of the approach of death, gave his last solemn advice to his son *Solomon*, and urged this particular instruction: *Observe the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes and commandments: that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself.*

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON.

Solomon, as soon as he was settled firmly in his kingdom, applied himself to the management of public affairs, and the encouragement of divine worship. The Lord looked down upon his conduct with approbation; and, after a sacrifice at Gibeon, appeared to him in a

Before
Christ
1015.

dream, and promised to give him whatever he should ask. The young prince did not ask for long life, or riches, or honour; but, conscious of the difficulty of governing an extensive kingdom, and dispensing justice to a numerous people, he desired a *wise and understanding heart*. The prudence and modesty of this request procured for him not only such a degree of wisdom as exceeded that of all other men, but also a promise of those blessings, which he had not asked, dependent upon his obedience to God.  *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.*

An opportunity soon offered for the trial of his wisdom; two women, bringing two children, the one dead and the other alive, came to him for justice; both disowned the dead child, both claimed the living child. How could the truth be discovered, and the infants be given to their proper mothers? *Solomon* had recourse to the workings of nature for the discovery of the secret: he commanded that the child, for which they contended with equal warmth, should be divided, and half of it given to each woman. One of them was willing to have it so divided; but the other cried out in despair and agony, that it should not be so; *O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means slay it*. This affectionate, anxious desire to save the life of the infant, manifested the true mother; and *Solomon* accordingly gave her the child, to the satisfaction of the whole assembly.

His wisdom was no less distinguished in the government of his kingdom, and in many learned treatises which he wrote upon the nature of plants and trees, and of beasts, birds, and fishes. Peace and plenty were diffused through his dominions; and by his extensive alliances and commerce, gold and silver were brought to him in such abundance, that the riches of the world seemed to have been gathered together in the city of *Jerusalem*. Having

by these means added a vast quantity of materials to those which *David* had collected, he applied himself to the great work which his father had so much at heart, and built a temple to the Lord. It was the most beautiful and magnificent edifice in the world. The grandeur and richness of it are thought to have exceeded all description. When it was finished, and the ark was deposited by the priests in the most holy place, *the glory of the Lord filled the house*, and appeared visibly, as it were, to take possession of it. Then the king offered up a wise and devout prayer, entreating God to hear favourably the supplications which his people should at any time offer in or toward that holy temple: to avert the evils they should fear, and grant the blessings they should ask.

The fame of the wisdom and magnificence of *Solomon* was spread through all the earth, and drew many persons of wealth and learning from the most distant nations to his court. Particularly the queen of *Sheba*, a princess as remarkable for understanding, as for power and riches, came from the farthest part of the south to see his glory, and be an ear-witness of his wisdom.

Solomon, however, so beloved of God, and so admired by men, did not persevere in this happy state: but *started aside like a broken bow*, and, from the love of wisdom, degenerated to the love of women and idolatry. He took wives out of those nations with which God had commanded the *Israelites* not to make any alliance. These soon corrupted his heart, and drew him from the service of the true God; so that he built temples for idols, and worshipped their gods and goddesses, going after *Ashtoreth*, the goddess of the *Zidonians*: and after *Milcom*, the abomination of the *Ammonites*. Thus the glory he had obtained by his wisdom and virtue was sullied and defaced; and the Lord expressed his indignation and anger, by raising up several enemies against him, and by foretelling that

64 *Division of the Kingdom under Rehoboam.*

he would take the kingdom from his family, and give it unto his servant; except a certain portion of it, which should be reserved to his son, for his servant *David's* sake.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM UNDER REHOBAM.

Before
Christ
975. *Rehoboam*, upon the death of his father, went to *Shechem*, in order to be proclaimed king; where all the congregation of *Israel*, being assembled on the occasion, desired him to redress some grievances, and lighten the yoke which had been laid upon them by *Solomon*. The old counsellors, who were experienced in the affairs of the nation, advised him to give a kind and gentle answer, that he might secure the affections of the people, and establish himself firmly upon the throne; but the advice of his young, giddy companions seemed, in his vain imagination, more agreeable to the dignity of his government: and, therefore, instead of soothing his subjects and promising redress, he threatened to increase their burthens, and govern them with greater severity than his father had done. Ten of the tribes were so offended at this harsh answer, that they disclaimed all allegiance to him; and made *Jeroboam*, a bold ambitious youth, king over them. The other two tribes, *Judah* and *Benjamin*, adhered firmly to the interest of *Rehoboam*, and conveyed him safely to *Jerusalem*.

Thus this kingdom, which was just rising into fame, was divided into two parts, the kingdom of *Judah*, and the kingdom of *Israel*: and thus God punished the sins of *Solomon* by the folly of *Rehoboam*; and manifested to the world, that he is the ruler of kings, turning their hearts whithersoever he pleaseth, according as they are the objects of his mercy, or of his indignation.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF ISRAEL.


Jeroboam, intent upon securing his new kingdom, beautified *Shechem*, and built a palace; and fearing lest the people, if they went at the public festivals to worship God at *Jerusalem*, according to the law, should be induced to dwell there, and become subjects to the king of *Judah*, he set up two golden calves, as objects of worship, in different parts of his kingdom. By this public institution of idolatry, the minds of the people were corrupted, and a door was opened to every kind of impiety and wickedness.

He also took upon himself the office of high-priest, and appointed any of the lowest of the people to be priests of the high places, where they performed false worship. But, as he was about to offer sacrifices at *Bethel*, a prophet, who came from *Jerusalem*, foretold, that that altar should be destroyed by a king of *Judah*, named *Josiah*; and when *Jeroboam*, being angry, stretched forth his hand to apprehend him, it became *withered*, and as it were dead: yet, upon his humiliation, and the prayers of the prophet, it was restored to him. He was not at all reclaimed, however, by this wonderful event, nor yet by the denunciation of Divine judgments by *Ahijah*; he persisted still in his idolatry, and drew off the minds of the people more and more from the worship of the true God.

Nadab succeeded his father *Jeroboam*, and Before resembled him in impiety: but within two Christ years he was slain by *Baasha*, who put all ^{953.} the family of *Jeroboam* to death. *Baasha* was succeeded by his son *Elah*, who in the second year of his reign was killed by *Zimri*, a captain of his chariots. But *Zimri*, who slew his master, had no peace; for the army immediately made *Omri*, their general, king; and *Zimri*, in despair, set fire to the palace, and was destroyed with it. *Omri* built the

city of *Samaria*, and made it the place of his residence. He not only walked in the ways of *Jero-boam, who made Israel to sin*, but is said in *Scripture* to have *done worse than all who were before him*.


Before *Ahab*, the next king, followed the example of his father *Omri*, and even exceeded it.

918. He married *Jezebel*, the daughter of *Ethbaal*, king of the *Sidonians*, a proud and cruel woman; and, by her persuasion and influence, built an altar to *Baal* in *Samaria*, and made a grove for a superstitious and impure worship. In his time lived *Elijah*, a great prophet, who having threatened a grievous famine, on account of the wickedness of *Ahab* and his people, retired to the brook *Cherith*, where he was fed for some time by ravens. The brook at length was dried up: he then went to *Zarephath*, where a poor industrious widow, though she had only a little meal remaining for herself and her son, cheerfully received him, and gave him a part; for which act of benevolence and compassion, he blessed her barrel of meal and her cruse of oil, so that they failed not during the famine. The widow's son afterwards fell sick and died; but, at her entreaty, *Elijah* prayed earnestly to God, and the child was restored to life.  Remember the poor widow's charity, and her reward: and be *merciful after thy power; if thou hast much, give plenteously; if thou hast a little, give gladly of that little; so wilt thou gather a good reward in the day of thine own necessity*.

The holy prophet took an opportunity of reproving *Ahab* for his idolatry, and desired him to collect all the people and the priests of *Baal* to mount *Carmel*; he there upbraided the *Israelites* with *haling between two opinions*. *If the Lord be God, says he, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. Let us, on each side, offer sacrifices, and the God that consumeth the sacrifice by fire, let him be acknowledged and served as the true God*. The priests of *Baal* immediately put a bullock upon the altar, and called

upon *Baal* from morning to noon : but *there was no voice to answer, nor any that regarded*. But when *Elijah* had put a bullock upon his altar, and entreated the Almighty to shew that he was the *Lord God*, a fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice : the people were at once astonished and convinced ; and, at the command of the prophet, seized the false priests and carried them to the brook *Kishon*, where they were put to death.

Ahab, however, hardened his heart against the Lord, and persisted in his wicked courses. And, looking with a covetous eye upon the vineyard of *Naboth*, which joined his palace, he contrived with *Jezebel*, by a false accusation, to have the poor man stoned to death, and then took possession of the field. God expressed high displeasure at this unjust and barbarous action ; and soon after, *Ahab* was slain in battle by a *Syrian*, as had been foretold by the prophet *Micaiah*. He was succeeded by his son *Ahaziah*, a weak and inglorious prince ; who died by a fall from his upper chamber, and *Jehoram*, his brother, (for he had no son,) reigned in his stead. This also was a wicked prince, but not so profane as his father and brother, for he removed the image of *Baal* : after which, having procured the friendship and assistance of *Jehoshaphat*, king of *Judah*, he overthrew the *Moabites*, who had rebelled against *Israel*.

About this time *Elijah* was translated by Before a whirlwind into heaven : but his spirit of Christ prophecy rested upon *Elisha*, who saw him 889. thus taken up. He immediately gave full proofs that God was with him, by dividing the waters of *Jordan* with his mantle ; and healing the waters of *Jericho* ; and afterwards, as he was travelling near *Bethel*, when a multitude of wicked children mocked him, and said unto him, *Go up, thou bald-head ; go up, thou bald-head : two bears rushed out of a wood and destroyed forty-two of them.*  A dreadful warning to those who turn human infirmities into

ridicule ; and make a mockery of others, because they are old and decrepit and bald-headed. *Thou shalt rise up*, says God, *before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man.*

Elisha performed several miracles in the execution of his prophetic office, supplying the armies of *Israel* and *Judah* with water ; increasing a poor woman's oil for the payment of her creditors ; giving a son to the charitable *Shunammite*, and afterwards restoring him to life, when he was dead ; healing *Naaman*, the *Syrian* general, of his leprosy, and fixing it upon his own servant *Gehazi* for his falsehood and covetousness ; and causing iron to swim. He also smote a great multitude of *Syrians*, who were sent to take him, with blindness : and afterwards, when *Benhadad* had besieged *Samaria*, and reduced the city to the most grievous famine and distress, the Lord spread a dreadful terror through his army in the night, so that they left their camp and provisions, and fled with the utmost expedition to their own country : in consequence of which the people were supplied with an unexpected plenty, according to a remarkable prediction of *Elisha*.



Jehu was raised to the throne by the Almighty, to execute vengeance on the house of *Ahab* : and began his reign by killing *Jehoram*, and causing *Jezebel* to be thrown from a window, whose body was devoured by dogs, as had been foretold by the prophet *Elijah*. He then cut off all the family of *Ahab* : and pretending a great zeal for *Baal*, collected all his priests together, and destroyed them and their temple. He proceeded to purify the kingdom and entirely banish that kind of idolatry ; but he was only a partial reformer, for he continued the idolatry of the calves, which *Jeroboam* had established.

Jehoahaz, the next king, did evil in the sight of the Lord, which exposed him and his people to the cruel oppressions of the king of *Syria* ; till, by his

repentance and supplication, the anger of the Lord was averted and deliverance granted. After a troublesome reign he left the kingdom to his son *Joash*, who obtained three complete victories over the king of *Syria*; and having overcome *Amaziah*, king of *Judah*, he spoiled the temple at *Jerusalem*, and took away the treasures of the king's house.

Jeroboam, the son of *Joash*, succeeded to the throne. He walked in the steps of his ancestors, and did evil in the sight of the Lord: ^{852.}

yet when the affliction of *Israel* was very bitter under the oppression of their enemies, and they cried unto the Lord, he had compassion on them, and wrought out their deliverance by the hand of *Jeroboam*. Being encouraged by the prophet *Jonah*, he overran all the country of *Syria*, recovered many territories which had been taken from *Israel*, and restored the kingdom to its former greatness.

 About this time *Jonah* was sent to denounce judgment against *Nineveh*, the metropolis of the *Assyrian* empire, because the wickedness of it was very great: but the prophet, afraid of fulfilling the commission, took ship for *Tarshish*. He was soon overtaken, however, by a dreadful storm; and the sailors, supposing him to be the occasion of their danger, threw him overboard. He was immediately swallowed by a whale, and, after having been wonderfully preserved for three days and nights, was thrown on shore: after which, with a penitent heart and devout submission to the will of God, he proceeded to *Nineveh*, and delivered the awful message. The inhabitants were so affected and alarmed with it, that they proclaimed a fast, and by their humiliation, and repentance, and prayer, obtained pardon and safety from the Lord.  It is certain that God might have preserved *Jonah* by appeasing the storm; but he made use of this very extraordinary method to manifest his power, and teach the prophet better obedience for the future; and especially to give an emblem or type of the burial and

resurrection of our Saviour ; for as *Jonah was three days and nights in the whale's belly, so was the Son of man three days and nights in the heart of the earth.*

After the successful reign of *Jeroboam*, there was a vacancy in the throne for several years, which was filled at last by *Zachariah*, the son of *Jero-*
Before Christ *boam*, from whose time to the captivity, the
 773. history is full of confusion, treason, and murder. *Zachariah*, at the end of six months, was slain publicly by *Shallum*. who usurped the crown, and after a reign of thirty days was killed by *Menahem*, his general.

Menahem was succeeded by his son *Pekahiah*, who, after two years' reign, was murdered in his own palace by *Pekah*, one of his generals: and
Before Christ *Pekah*, after having seen the kingdom over-
 721. run by the *Assyrians*, and reduced to a state of anarchy and confusion, was murdered in his turn by *Hoshea* ; in whose time the government of *Israel* was totally destroyed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CAPTIVITY OF THE ISRAELITES.

THE great Creator and Father of all had called the *Hebrews*, as a chosen generation and a peculiar people, and had trained them up by many wonderful methods in the knowledge of himself ; not only that they might preserve a spirit of true piety and religion among themselves, but also that they might be the happy means of reforming the idolatry and ignorance of other nations. Yet, instead of complying with this important design of Providence, they defeated it by giving way to the superstitious delusions of the heathens, and going astray after other gods. They set up images, and worshipped the host of heaven, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord. The Almighty patiently endured their ingratitude and wickedness for a long

course of years, and earnestly invited them by several sacred messengers to repentance. He also often afflicted them by private calamities, and domestic troubles, as well as by foreign enemies, in order to bring them to a sense of their impieties, and a real amendment of heart and life. But, at last, when they were hardened in sin and idolatry, and grew worse and worse, he resolved to execute the heavy judgments which had been denounced against them, to destroy their kingdom, and scatter *them among all people.*

Accordingly *in* the reign of *Hoshea*, the king of *Assyria* invaded the country, took *Samaria* by storm, after a siege of three years, and quite destroyed it. He shut up *Hoshea* in prison, and having carried the people away captive, settled them in different parts of *Assyria* and *Media*. He also transplanted a great number of his own subjects into *Samaria* and the country round about, that they might enjoy the land of the *Israelites*, and keep the rest of the people in subjection. Thus this kingdom, after it had continued two hundred and fifty-four years, was destroyed, and the people scattered, according to what the prophet *Hosea* had foretold; *God shall cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations.*

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF JUDAH.

Rehoboam, upon the revolt of the ten tribes, raised a large army, in order to reduce them to obedience; but was prevented from marching against them by the prophet *Shemaiah*, who informed him that the division of the kingdom took place by Divine appointment. He soon forsook the true worship of God, and gave himself up to idolatry and wickedness, in which he was too readily followed by his subjects. Therefore God sent against

them the *Egyptians*, who entered *Jerusalem*, and spoiled the temple and the palace of their treasures. He left the state much diminished to his son *Abijah*, who gained a complete victory over *Jeroboam*, and recovered many cities and strong places from the *Israelites*; yet he walked in the sins of his father, and his heart was not perfect with the Lord.

Before *Asa*, his son, who succeeded him, employed Christ the first years of his reign in rooting out 955. idolatry, and reforming his kingdom: he destroyed the groves and images, adorned the temple with vessels of gold and silver, and trained up his subjects in the art of war. His piety was crowned with a signal victory over the *Ethiopians*; but afterwards, being engaged in war with *Baasha*, he shewed a distrust of the Divine power and goodness, by purchasing the assistance of the king of *Syria*, and growing peevish and impatient under a severe distemper in his feet, he cast a prophet into prison, who was sent to reprove him for his error.

Before *Jehoshaphat*, the next king, began his reign Christ with the utter destruction of idolatry; and 914. sent priests through the kingdom to instruct the people in their duty; so that he was beloved by his subjects, and honoured by the neighbouring nations. But he was guilty of a great error in marrying his son *Jehoram* to *Athaliah*, the daughter of *Ahab*, the idolatrous king of *Israel*, and in making an alliance with him against the king of *Syria*. He endeavoured, however, to repair his fault by a more fervent zeal for divine worship, and a stricter administration of justice. Therefore, when the *Ammonites* and *Moabites* invaded his dominions, the Lord spread a terror among them; so that, mistaking one another for enemies, they carried on a mutual slaughter, till the whole army was destroyed: after which *Jehoshaphat* ended his days in peace.

Before *Jehoram*, his son, as soon as he had got the Christ crown, in order to secure it, murdered all his 892. brothers, and, being influenced by his wicked

queen, established the worship of *Baal* through his kingdom. The displeasure of the Almighty was manifested in the revolt of the *Edomites*; and again in an invasion by the *Philistines* and *Ammonites*, who ravaged his country and plundered *Jerusalem*. After which calamity he was attacked by a grievous disease in the bowels, and died in a miserable manner.


Ahaziah, his son, entered into a strict friendship with *Jehoram* king of *Israel*, and was involved in the same judgment with him; for *Jehu* slew them both at the same time. Upon his death his mother *Athaliah* usurped the throne; and, that she might possess it without opposition, endeavoured to destroy all his children. But *Jehoash*, an infant, was secretly conveyed away by the wife of *Jehoiada* the high priest; and, after seven years, *Athaliah*, who had filled the kingdom with murders and impieties, was slain, and the young prince placed upon the throne. His reign was flourishing and happy, while he was guided by *Jehoiada*: idolatry was banished, and true religion was restored: but upon the death of that good and prudent counsellor, he gave way to the insinuating persuasions of bad men, and revived the worship of idols. His guilt was soon followed with punishment: he was conquered by the *Syrians*, vexed with sore diseases, and at last treacherously slain by his own servants.

Amaziah, having his father's example and ^{Before} fate before his eyes, began his reign with ^{Christ} piety; but did not long continue in the fear ^{839.} and favour of God. A glorious victory which he obtained over the *Edomites*, swelled his heart with pride; and so great was his infatuation, that he forsook God, the author of his success, and paid adoration to the idols of *Edom*, which could not deliver their own worshippers out of his hand. He was afterwards defeated by the king of *Israel*, and at last killed by his own subjects.


Uzziah, who is also called *Azariah*, being seated

on the throne, conducted himself with great wisdom and goodness, and was blessed with success against the neighbouring nations. He repaired and fortified *Jerusalem*, and invented many instruments and engines of war. He was also a great lover of husbandry; planting vines, and feeding many cattle. But his success proved his ruin; prosperity corrupted his heart; elated with pride he usurped the priest's office, and offered to burn incense: but in the attempt was suddenly stricken with leprosy; upon which he retired to a private house, where he continued under the infection to the day of his death.

Before Christ 761. As *Uzziah* was rendered incapable of conducting public affairs, *Jotham*, his son, took the government into his hands; he inherited his father's virtues without his vices: he was religious towards God, and righteous towards man. He died in peace, and was succeeded by his wicked son, *Ahaz*, who re-established idolatry; and, after the abomination of the heathen, *sacrificed in the valley of the sons of Hinnom, and made his children pass through the fire to Moloch.* *Rezin* king of *Syria*, and *Pekah* king of *Izrael*, attacked his kingdom in different parts, and carried away many captives and rich spoils. *In his distress, he trespassed yet more against the Lord*; he even shut up the doors of the temple, and entirely suppressed the worship of the Supreme Being; and went on in a course of shocking profaneness, till he finished his inglorious reign in the thirty-sixth year of his age. Before Christ 726. *Hezekiah*, his son, having observed the distresses of the country, and considered the source of them, endeavoured to apply a proper remedy. He opened the temple, and restored divine worship, according to the law of *Moses*. He broke the images, cut down the groves, and cleansed the city and the land from the pollution of idols. After several years of peace and prosperity, he was seized with a severe illness, and forewarned by the prophet *Isaiah* to prepare for death, as it was beyond the power

of human art to recover him. The king, being anxious for his country, which the *Assyrians* were now invading, as well as from a natural aversion to death, entreated for a longer life; and his fervent prayers were such powerful advocates with the Father of mercies, that *Isaiah* was sent to assure him, that fifteen years should be added to his life, and that his kingdom should be delivered from the *Assyrians*. The Lord also, to convince him of the truth of this prophecy, caused the sun (or at least the rays of it) to go back ten degrees upon a sundial in the palace of *Sennacherib*. The king of *Assyria* had already made a rapid conquest of the land of *Judah*; and, as he drew near to *Jerusalem*, he sent an infamous, blasphemous, letter to the king. *Hezekiah* prepared for a vigorous defence; but at the same time relied wholly upon the Divine assistance. He therefore spread the letter before the Lord, and earnestly implored him to vindicate his honour, and rescue him and his people from the impending ruin. God heard his prayer; and while the proud and haughty conqueror was intending to storm the city, and already thought himself master of it, *in that very night the angel of the Lord smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand.*  Thus the time of extremity was the time of mercy; and when all things were desperate, *the Lord saved Hezekiah; for he trusted in the Lord God of Israel, and gave unto him*; and indeed, whosoever putteth his trust in the Lord shall never be confounded.

Hezekiah died in peace, universally lamented, and was succeeded by his son *Manasseh*, Before Christ 698. who was as zealous to restore idolatry, as his father had been to destroy it: he abandoned himself to every kind of wickedness and cruelty, and filled the city with the blood of the priests and prophets of the Lord; but was stopped in his mad career by the *Assyrians*, who carried him in chains to *Babylon*.

 In his affliction, however, he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, who therefore mercifully restored him to his liberty and to his throne. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God. He afterwards enjoyed a long and prosperous reign, and shewed his penitence and gratitude in a holy and religious life.

Before Amon, upon succeeding to the throne, took Christ the former part of his father's reign for his 643. example, and did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. The repentance and piety of Manasseh were forgotten, and the kingdom was soon overrun with idolatry and sin. After two years he was killed by his servants, and the crown descended to his son, the pious Josiah: who brought about a total reformation. He demolished all the idols, and particularly the altar at Bethel, as had been foretold. He repaired the temple, restored the regular worship of God, and caused the book of the law to be read and explained by the priests publicly and distinctly to the people. He died of a wound which he received in a battle with the Egyptians: and his youngest son, Jehoahaz, was made king by the people; but he was soon dethroned by the king of Egypt, who gave the crown to Eliakim, his eldest brother, and changed his name to Jehoiakim.

Before Jehoiakim, who was deaf to the reproof Christ and denunciations of the prophet Jeremiah, 606. was soon obliged to become tributary to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who carried Daniel and a great number of the Jews into captivity. Afterwards, upon a refusal of payment, he took Jerusalem, slew the king, and gave the crown to his son Jehoiachin. But that powerful monarch, who was the instrument of Divine vengeance against the Jews, soon returned, stripped the temple and the city of their treasures, and carried the king and many thousand captives to Babylon.

Zedekiah, uncle to Jehoiachin, was then ap-


pointed king by him, and continued faithful to him for some years; but, at length, being deceived by false prophets, and disregarding the advice of *Jeremiah*, who recommended patience and submissive trust in God, he rebelled against *Nebuchadnezzar*, and brought destruction upon himself and his country.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CAPTIVITY OF THE TWO TRIBES.

THE history of the *Jews* is the history of Divine Providence, containing many wonderful proofs of God's superintending all public events, and directing them uniformly according to the rules of justice and righteousness. While they cherished piety and virtue, they flourished and dwelt safely: they were successful in war, and rich and happy in peace; and when, on the contrary, they departed from the commandments of the Lord, and did that which was evil in his sight, the Almighty either sent a famine, or drought, or pestilence, or stirred up the neighbouring nations against them, for the punishment of their guilt, and the reformation of their lives. But *hardness of heart* was the prevailing character of the *Jews*; they were remarkable for a strong inclination to worship idols, and to work wickedness; neither the different chastisements inflicted upon them, nor the instructions and examples of the prophets, nor the dreadful judgments clearly and repeatedly denounced against them, nor even the recent destruction of the kingdom of *Israel*, were able to root it out; and at length they became so wicked, so corrupt, and so idolatrous, that *the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen, and the house of which I said my name shall be there.* Accordingly, in the reign of *Zedekiah*, king of *Judah*, that kingdom was

also overrun by the *Assyrians*, who plundered the sacred temple of the great God, set fire to that and the city, and carried away the king and the people to *Babylon*.


 May we learn in all events, both public and private, to consider God as present and directing all things! May we fix our view upon him in all our designs, and all our works, in every circumstance of life and every action of the day! And as the declining state of practical godliness amongst us, and the prevailing corruption and dissoluteness of manners, clearly show that the measure of our iniquity, as a nation, is filling up very fast, and that we have reason to expect some grievous punishment; may we turn unto the Lord, now while he holds back his hand from judgment, and gives us space to repent! May we apply ourselves heartily to reform our own temper and conduct, and study to promote the practice of piety and virtue amongst others, that we may draw down from Heaven the blessings of prosperity and peace upon our neighbours, as well as upon ourselves; for (as we have seen in the history of the Jews) *righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach and ruin of a people.*

CHAPTER XXXII.

SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO.

THE prophet *Daniel* had been carried away with some friends, among whom were *Shadrach, Meshach,* and *Abednego*, into captivity to *Babylon*; where, after some time, having discovered to the king, by the assistance of God, his dream and the interpretation of it, which the wise men of the kingdom were incapable of doing, he was made governor of the whole province, and his friends were advanced to places of chief dignity and trust. The great men, however, whose hearts were set upon these high offices, observed them with a jealous eye, and industriously sought an occasion of bringing about their


ruin. Therefore when these friends, out of zeal for the honour of God, refused to pay adoration to a golden image, which the king had commanded all men to worship, threatening that they who did not comply should be cast into a *burning furnace*; they were accused of the violation of the royal law, and condemned to undergo that severe punishment. *But the angel of the Lord came down, and made the furnace as it had been a moist whistling wind, so that the fire touched them not at all.* Upon which the king cried out with amazement and joy, *Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him.*

 The Lord watcheth over the righteous: no power can deprive them of his protection: in the most distressing circumstances he is able to deliver them: and though he suffer the malice of their enemies to prevail even unto death, yet still they are safe; his favour reacheth beyond the grave; *his loving-kindness is better than life itself.* While I live, therefore, I will not remove mine integrity from me; but will commit myself unto the Lord in well-doing, after the example of those pious heroes: *O Nebuchadnezzar, our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and, we trust, will deliver us out of thy hand. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*

CHAPTER XXXIII.


THE PERSECUTION AND DELIVERANCE OF DANIEL.

AFTER several years, the city of *Babylon* Before was taken, and the government totally de- Christ stroyed by the *Medes* and *Persians*, according 538. to the express denunciations of *Daniel* and other prophets. Upon which *Darius*, (called also *Cyaxares*,) uncle of *Cyrus* the Great, and confederate with him in the war, united the kingdom of *Babylon* to that

of *Media*: and having divided all his dominions into one hundred and twenty provinces, appointed *Daniel* the first president of the whole empire; to which high office his experience and wisdom justly entitled him. This exaltation of *Daniel* gave great offence to the princes and nobles; they were envious of his superior merit, as well as of his superior dignity, and resolved to embrace the first opportunity of impeaching his conduct, and depriving him of his honours. In vain, however, did they keep a strict eye upon his administration of public affairs; for he directed all things with such prudence and integrity, as precluded all accusation or reproach; *there was no error or fault found in him.* At length, by a wicked contrivance, they turned even his piety and devotion into an instrument of their malice; for they procured an edict from the king, forbidding all persons to offer any prayers to God or man except to the king, for thirty days, under the penalty of being cast into the den of lions. *Daniel* was not terrified by the danger that threatened him, into any mean dissimulation, but preferred his duty to every consideration in the world: and, supported by conscious innocence and a steady trust in the Divine power and goodness, *he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he had done aforetime.*  *Fear not them who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but fear Him, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.*

The enemies of *Daniel* immediately accused him of having transgressed the royal decree, and urged the execution of the sentence with so much earnestness, that the king, though with great reluctance, gave way to their importunity, and commanded him to be cast into the den of lions. But *God sent an angel, and stopped the lions' mouths that they should not hurt him, because innocence was found in him, and because he believed in his God.* And when the king, who returned to the den the next morning with the

utmost anxiety, found that the Almighty had preserved his faithful servant, he caused him to be taken out, and his wicked accusers to be thrown among the beasts; which, though they had no power over *Daniel*, immediately killed and devoured them.

 *The Lord is known by that judgment which he executeth; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands, and sunk down in the pit which they made.*

The king, astonished at the goodness and justice of Divine Providence, thus wonderfully manifested, published a decree through all his dominions, commanding men to acknowledge and reverence *the God of Daniel, who is the living God, and stedfast for ever. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.*

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RETURN OF THE CAPTIVES, AND RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE.


Cyrus, the king of *Persia* and *Babylon*, (who succeeded his uncle,) had been pointed out by his name, in the prophecy of *Isaiah*, two hundred years before his birth; and was raised by the Almighty to deliver his people, and restore them to the land of their fathers. When, therefore, the *Jews* had continued seventy years in captivity, which was the time foretold by the prophet *Jeremiah*, *Cyrus* published a decree, allowing them to return to *Jerusalem*, and rebuild the city and temple. Many thousand captives assembled for this purpose; and being arrived at *Judea*, under the conduct of *Zerubbabel*, applied themselves earnestly to the desired work, and laid the foundation of the temple with great joy. But the *Samaritans* (the people who had been planted in the cities of the *Israelites* upon their captivity) by various arts obstructed the undertaking, so that the building went on very

slowly, till the decree of *Cyrus* was revived and confirmed by *Darius*, and the prophets *Haggai* and *Zechariah* stirred up the people with promises and threats from God; upon which they renewed the work with uncommon zeal and vigour, and finished it with great expedition.

Before Christ 458. After several years, *Ahasuerus* (who is also called *Artaxerxes*) gave ample power to *Ezra*, a man of a pious and good temper, and deeply skilled in the knowledge of Scripture, to settle the *Jewish* government, and restore the worship of God. He executed the commission with fervent piety and diligence, and in a great measure reformed and regulated the affairs both of Church and State. He also collected the books of the Old Testament, examined and corrected them, and placed them in proper order for the instruction of the people.

Notwithstanding the zeal and diligence of *Ezra*, the city still remained in a ruinous and miserable state; without gates and without walls; open to the invasion, as well as subject to the reproaches, of every enemy. *Nehemiah*, cup-bearer to *Ahasuerus*, being informed of this dismal condition of the holy city, was so affected with it, that he earnestly entreated the king for permission to go thither: the king readily granted his request, and gave him full commission to repair and fortify the city. Upon his arrival at *Jerusalem*, he undertook the work with great resolution, and persevered in it unweariedly, till it was finished and completed. He obliged usurers and oppressors to restore to every man his right, and lived in a generous, hospitable manner, giving up the lawful salary due to him as governor, and entertaining a great number every day at his table. He dissolved all unlawful marriages among the *Jews*; and required those who had taken wives from other nations to put them away. He restored divine worship to a regular state, and caused the law also to be read and expounded to the people. By these means he brought about such a reforma-

tion in their minds, that on a day appointed for a solemn fast, the princes, priests, and *Levites*, made a public acknowledgment of the goodness of God and of their own wickedness, and entered into a sacred covenant with the Almighty, to which they set *their hands and seals*, that they would walk in his law, and obey him diligently for the future.

 Permit me, O Lord, to enter into a solemn engagement with thee, in imitation of the *Jews* under *Nehemiah*; that I may consider myself as one of thy covenant children, and look up unto thee as my Father and my God. I was graciously admitted into covenant with thee at my baptism; and I desire now to renew it with full understanding and consent of mind. I make a willing surrender of myself to thy service; and, as it is hearty and sincere, oh, may it be entire and perpetual! Let every sin be avoided by me; let every wish, which is inconsistent with thy will, be subdued and rooted out, and let me be wholly thine for ever. Amen.


CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER.

Ahasuerus had raised *Haman*, his chief favourite, to the highest honours, and commanded the people to reverence and bow the knee to him. But *Mordecai* a *Jew*, and servant of the king, apprehending, perhaps, that the reverence and homage required, was more than ought to be paid to man, disregarded the command, and took no notice of him as he passed. This neglect and seeming contempt so irritated the proud *Haman*, that he determined to destroy not only *Mordecai*, but his whole nation too. *Haman*, also, very probably, bore some resentment against the *Jews* in general, because he was descended from the *Amalekites*, whose nation had been destroyed by the *Israelites*. Influenced by these motives, he represented them to the king, as a

wicked and obstinate, a seditious and rebellious people, and prevailed upon him to sign a decree for the destruction of all the *Jews*, men, women, and children, throughout his empire.

This bloody decree spread terror and grief among the *Jews*, who immediately with weeping and fasting prayed for deliverance to Him, who had so often forgiven their sins, and rescued them from imminent danger. The God who heareth prayer had compassion on them, and turned the wicked designs of *Haman* to his own ruin: for the king being one night restless, and incapable of sleep, ordered his attendant to read to him the records of his reign; and being thereby reminded of the great merit of *Mordecai*, who had saved his life from conspirators, and yet had not been rewarded, he called *Haman*, and asked him what honour should be done unto the man whom he greatly loved. *Haman*, presuming that he alone was beloved by the king, gave such advice as suited his own ambition. Upon which the king commanded that *Mordecai* should be arrayed in the royal robe, and ride through the city in triumph; and that *Haman* should lead the horse, and proclaim before him, *Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.*

Afterwards *Esther* the queen, who was a *Jewess*, took an opportunity to inform the king of the ambition and cruelty of *Haman*, and entreated for the lives of herself and her people: and the king, being fully satisfied of the guilt of his favourite, ordered that he should be hanged upon a high gallows, which *Haman* himself had a little before erected, intending to hang *Mordecai* on it. *Mordecai*, on the contrary, was raised to great honour and power; and an edict was immediately published through the kingdom in favour of the *Jews*, who appointed two days to be observed yearly for ever, as days of rejoicing, in thankful remembrance of this providential escape from destruction.  Thus *Haman* ate of the fruit of his own way, and was filled with his

own devices.—God disappointeth the devices of the crafty ; He putteth down the mighty from their seat, and scattereth the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

CHAPTER XXXVI.


THE BOOK OF JOB.


Job lived in the eastern land of *Uz*, and seems to have been a person of exalted rank : his substance and possessions were very great : he had also seven sons and three daughters : but he was more distinguished and honoured for his piety and benevolence ; for *he feared God and eschewed evil*. Satan is represented as suspecting the sincerity of this good man, and alleging, that if he was deprived of his fortune and health, his temper and conduct would change with his circumstances. Permission, therefore, was granted by the Almighty for the trial of his integrity, and accordingly afflictions were heaped upon his head : he became as remarkable for calamity as he had been for prosperity ; his oxen and camels were taken away by robbers ; his sheep were consumed by lightning, and his children overwhelmed by a house blown down by a whirlwind. He was afterwards seized with a violent distemper, which overspread his body with sore boils, from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head ; and his wife, who ought to have taken a share of his distress, and lessen the weight of it by all the kind offices in her power, rashly advised him to murmur against the Divine justice, and to provoke God to destroy him.

His friends concluded from his uncommon calamities, that he was a great sinner and hypocrite ; and argued with him, that God is strictly just, rewarding virtue and punishing vice ; and that therefore he must either confess his own guilt, or charge God with unrighteousness. *Job* in his answer acknowledges, indeed, that he is not infallible, and free from common failings, and that consequently

he ought to be humble and submissive under the hand of God ; but insists, that he was honest and sincere in the discharge of his duty, and appeals in vindication of it, from the false judgment of men, to the unerring judgment of God. He asserts, that there is little or no difference between the good and the wicked in the external administration of Providence ; that both are liable to the same misfortunes, and often involved in one common ruin ; which fully proves that there must be a future state, in which the righteous who suffer here will be signally rewarded. *I know that my Redeemer liveth ; and though worms destroy this body, yet shall mine eyes behold God.*

At length, in order to determine the debate, the unerring Judge himself is represented as interposing, to shew how unable men are to explain the ways and designs of Heaven, and to declare in favour of *Job*, against the opinion of his friends: *Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.* He then put an end to his sufferings, blessed him with a numerous offspring, *and gave him twice as much wealth as he had before ;* so that the latter end of his life was more prosperous than the beginning of it.

 We should learn from this excellent book not to judge and condemn others because they are poor, or sick, or under any calamity. Afflictions are no proof of man's being wicked and forsaken by God. *Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*—Christ, though pure and spotless, and highly beloved of God, suffered and died upon the cross.

 The example of *Job* teacheth us to employ ourselves and our wealth in doing good to others, according to their various necessities. He was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, a father to the poor, a refuge to the stranger, the defender of the oppressed, the comforter of the widow, and the protector of him that had none to help him.—They

who are *rich in this world*, should be *rich in good works, ready to give, glad to distribute.*

It teacheth us also to resign ourselves patiently to our afflictions, and to bend our wills to the Divine will: still to rely upon God with full trust and confidence, and not only to *justify* but to *glorify him in all that is brought upon us.* *What!* says Job, *shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord.*

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PSALMS.

THE Psalms have been valued and esteemed by the Church of God in all ages, as an excellent store-house of devotion: they are composed in the genuine spirit of piety, and so very beautiful and affecting, that, while we read them, they enlighten our minds, and warm our hearts, and we catch some degree of the spirit with which they are written. They contain also such an agreeable and extensive variety of subjects, that every devout person may find passages applicable to his particular circumstances and state of mind, and easily digest them under proper heads for his private use.

In some, the power, wisdom, and goodness of God in the works of creation are elegantly set forth, as in the 8th, 19th, 104th, and 111th; while others celebrate the constant administration of Providence, and record several wonderful events in the establishment of the *Jewish* church and nation, as the 33d, 46th, 48th, 78th, 106th, 107th, and 147th.—Some declare the excellency of the divine laws, that the commandments of God are pure and righteous, giving wisdom to the simple and conversion to the sinner: while others shew the solid comfort and happiness which spring from the sincere observance of them. *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage*

for ever ; for they are the very joy of my heart. Such are the 1st, 15th, 19th, 112th, and 119th.

Are you oppressed with public grievances, or disquieted with private calamities ? You are there furnished with the most moving addresses to the Almighty for relief under the affliction : and while you read and meditate, will experience that *the Lord is a refuge in the time of trouble* : and that *happy is he, whose hope is in the Lord his God.* Read the 13th, 22d, 23d, 25th, 27th, 31st, 37th, 86th, 88th, 142d, and 146th.

Are your iniquities like a sore burden, too heavy for you to bear ? and are you groaning after pardon and peace ? Look into the penitential Psalms, and you will say, These confessions and these cries for mercy are mine : there you may learn to *offer up the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart, which God will not despise.* Such are the 6th, 32d, 38th, 51st, and 130th.

Have you received any public or private blessings from the hand of God, and would you return the acknowledgments due to your divine Benefactor ? The Psalms are full of thanksgiving to the Father of mercies ; every page will teach you to praise the Lord for his goodness, and stir up all that is within you to adore and bless his glorious name. Read particularly the 18th, 30th, 96th, 98th, 100th, 103d, 116th, 118th, and 145th.

Observe the fervency of mind and the enlargement of heart, the desire and delight with which *David* offered his prayers and praises to the Author of every good gift. He rejoiced when he went up to the house of God ; he meditated in the divine law night and day ; it was sweeter to him than honey and the honey-comb ; yet he had but an imperfect view of the glorious kingdom of the *Messiah*. With what joy and rapture then ought we to come before the Lord, who are brought to a clearer knowledge and freer access to the throne of grace ; to whom the treasures of Divine goodness have been

clearly revealed ; who have received the Spirit of adoption, and the full promise of everlasting life !

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

THE Book of Proverbs, written by *Solomon*, is a collection of wise and moral sayings ; which, though not connected in the way of a regular discourse, but put together without order or method, have a general design, and contain easy and instructive rules for the direction of our whole behaviour. They are sufficient to *give wisdom to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion* : and, being adapted to the weakest understanding and capacity, should be put early into the hands of youth, and recommended to their attentive perusal.

Solomon remembers with gratitude the good instructions given him by *David* ; and from his own experience advises others to *hear the instructions of their father, and not to forsake the law of their mother*. —He cautions youth against the insinuating arts of evil company, and warns them to keep at a distance from the danger : *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Walk not in the way with them : refrain thy foot from their path*. He recommends purity and chastity, by shewing the desperate state of the thoughtless wretch, who, giving himself up to the pursuit of sensual gratification, *goeth as an ox to the slaughter, and as a fool to the correction of the stocks*.

The idle and indolent have a striking lesson in *the field of the slothful, which was covered with thorns and nettles* ; and are sent to learn industry and prudence from irrational creatures : *Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise*.

The doctrines and precepts of religious virtue are described as far exceeding in value those things which are highly desired among men : *Wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things which may be*


desired are not to be compared with it. Therefore we are called upon to make it our choice, and use our utmost endeavours to attain it. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding. The study and practice of it are also enforced by the peculiar advantages and blessings which attend it; Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Whoso findeth wisdom, findeth life, and shall obtain the favour of the Lord.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES.

THIS instructive book is supposed to have been written by *Solomon*, in his old age, after his happy recovery from idolatry and sensuality, as a penitential confession of his guilt, and a serious admonition to all those who give themselves up to the extravagances of sin and folly. The main scope and design of it is to teach us, that the happiness of human life does not consist in the abundance of riches, or in the splendour of titles, in the gratifications of the voluptuous sensualist, or the impious jest and jollity of the profane. He strictly forbids the indulgence of youthful vanities, stops the poor giddy creature *who is walking in the way of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes*, with this alarming address, *Know thou that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment*: and calls earnestly to those who are just entering into life, to devote their early bloom to the service of God: *Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth*, and do not defer this important concern *till the evil days come*, till old age and infirmities overtake you, and death and judgment are ready to take hold of you. *For though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet surely God will judge the righteous and the wicked: I know that it shall be well with*

them that fear God, but it shall not be well with the wicked. Therefore, after a serious review of his labours and enjoyments, he sums up his opinion in that affectionate conclusion, *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty, and the whole happiness of man.*

 To whom, gracious God, can I go for happiness, but to thee? Now, therefore, *in the days of my youth*, do I surrender myself unto thy blessed guidance and direction. I bid an eternal defiance to all the deceitful pleasures of sin; and resolve from this moment, to cherish a lively, constant *remembrance of my Creator*, and to seek for satisfaction and happiness only in the fear and love, the knowledge and obedience of thee, the inexhaustible source of joy, and bountiful author of all good, through the mediation of thy blessed Son Jesus Christ. Amen.


CHAPTER XL.

THE PROPHETS.

THE Prophets were persons inspired and directed by the supreme Being, to instruct the people in the true sense and obligation of the divine law, and to enforce the practice of it upon their minds; and also to foretel events, and make such discoveries of the designs of infinite wisdom, as God was pleased from time to time to communicate to them. Upon some particular occasions too, when the honour of God, and the truth of the Prophets were called in question, they were endued with a power of working miracles: which are certain infallible proofs of a divine mission, and carry immediate conviction to the attentive mind.

Upon searching their sacred records (for some of them committed their admonitions and heavenly messages to writing for the benefit of succeeding ages) we find, that in the execution of their office,

they were not influenced by any considerations of private interest, but exposed themselves to poverty, contempt, and persecution. Holy and unblameable in their own manners, they boldly protested against the flagrant immoralities of the people, and reproved even kings for their vices; they openly reproached their countrymen for their idolatry and wickedness, taught them the plain necessary truths of religion and virtue, and exhorted them by gentle persuasions and terrible denunciations *to turn from their evil ways, and to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.*

Some of these predictions, recorded in the Old Testament, related to particular occasions, and remarkable incidents in the *Jewish* history; they were express and circumstantial; they were published long before their accomplishment; and pointed out events, which no human wisdom could have foreseen, and which indeed were contrary to the outward appearance of things. The exact completion of their prophecies, therefore, proves undeniably, that such events were the constant objects of Divine attention, and came to pass by the direction of an invisible agency.—It not only establishes the authority and mission of the Prophets, so as to give weight and efficacy to their doctrines; but also naturally tends to raise our thoughts and views to the Creator, to cherish a lively sense of his universal providence, and to bring man to an entire dependence on his power and goodness, and a sincere obedience to his will.  All events are under the inspection and government of God; he watches over us in every moment and every circumstance of life, and *worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.* May this reflection have its proper effect upon the mind! God reigneth, and all is well; infinite wisdom and righteousness and goodness are present, and preside everywhere; *The Lord reigneth; let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad.*

But the grand ultimate object of the prophetic

spirit was Jesus Christ, who was designed in the everlasting counsel of the Father to be the Saviour of the world, and whom therefore he gradually foretold and pointed out to the faith and hope of his people. Whoever carefully examines the Old Testament concerning this matter, will easily learn, that one and the same design is regularly pursued; and that there is a series of remarkable prophecies delivered by different persons, and at different times; which yet all unite and meet together in Christ as their proper centre. Immediately upon the fall, God was pleased to give our unhappy parents an obscure intimation of the great Redeemer, *who was to be born of a woman, and bruise the serpent's head.* This gracious design was revealed a little farther to *Abraham*, in the gracious promise, that *in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed.*—Then more distinctly to *Moses*, under the rites and sacrifices of the law, which were shadows and figures of *Him who was to come.* Afterwards, in the successive ages of the Church, the prophecies were more and more explicit; and his family, and the time of his appearance were described and distinctly marked out, that when he actually came, he might be easily known and distinguished.

Of the twelve prophets, let the memorial be blessed; let their bones flourish again out of their place; for they comforted Jacob, and delivered them by a certain hope.

CHAPTER XLI.

FROM THE DEATH OF NEHEMIAH TO THE COMING OF CHRIST.

AFTER the death of *Nehemiah*, the government and high priesthood were united in one person; but this circumstance was productive of many ambitious contests, and of much treachery and cruelty even among the nearest relations.—The people quietly

paid tribute to the *Persian* monarch for many years: at length *Alexander the Great*, who commanded the *Grecian* forces, having overthrown the *Persian* empire, marched against *Jerusalem*; but, being affected with the solemn, penitent, procession of the high priests, and others, he took them under his protection, and granted them several privileges.

Upon his death, *Ptolemy*, king of *Egypt*, invaded *Judea*; and, being informed that the *Jews* were so superstitious, as not to fight or even defend themselves on their sabbath, he entered *Jerusalem* on that day, took possession of it, and exacted a yearly tribute from them. They continued in subjection to the *Egyptians*, till *Antiochus* king of *Syria* persuaded them to submit to him, and bestowed some considerable privileges upon them. But his brother *Antiochus Epiphanes*, who succeeded him, persecuted them with the utmost rigour, in order to compel them to lay aside their divine worship, and offer sacrifice unto idols; upon which trying occasion, many, in defence of their religion, cheerfully underwent the most bitter torments and cruel deaths. *Judas Maccabeus*, a famous general and good man, opposed the persecutors, overthrew the forces of *Samaria* and *Syria*, subdued several nations round *Jerusalem*, and revived the declining power and glory of the *Jews*. The affairs of the nation were conducted with prosperity under several succeeding high-priests: till *Hyrchanus* and *Aristobulus*, the son of *Jannæus*, contending for the power, applied for protection to *Pompey*, who had reduced *Syria*, and was then at *Damascus*; *Pompey* went immediately to *Jerusalem*, where he put *Aristobulus* in chains, and appointed *Hyrchanus* high-priest, and prince of the *Jews*, obliging him to pay a yearly tribute. Afterwards the *Parthians*, having conquered *Asia the Less*, and *Syria*, made *Hyrchanus* prisoner, and settled *Antigonus*, the son of *Aristobulus*, upon the throne. Upon this *Herod*, who was then the governor of

Galilee, fled to *Rome*, where, by bribery, he prevailed upon the senate to make him king of *Judea*; and under that authority he stormed *Jerusalem*, and took possession of the kingdom. He governed with great injustice and inhumanity, for which the *Jews* complained of him to *Antony* the *Roman* general; but his presents and persuasions rendered all their accusations ineffectual. He afterwards built several cities; and, in order to ingratiate himself with the *Jews*, pulled down the temple at *Jerusalem*, and erected a new one at his own expense, higher and more magnificent than the former.

During this period of the *Jewish* history, God seems to have almost totally forsaken the *Jews*. The gift of prophecy was withdrawn, and that free communication of the Divine will, which had been the glory of their nation: and their state, which had made so great a figure in former times, was become mean and contemptible, the prey of every tyrant and conqueror. This, indeed, was a just punishment for their abounding in wickedness and corruption of manners; but thus also the designs of Providence were carried on; for, by their various revolutions and dispersions, they were mixed among other nations, and spread more and more the knowledge of their religion, and their hope, so that there prevailed about this time a general and earnest expectation of *Him* who was to be a light to lighten the *Gentiles*, and the salvation of God unto the ends of the earth.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PARTICULAR STATE OF THE JEWS AT THE COMING OF OUR SAVIOUR.

AT the time of our Saviour's coming into the world the *Jews* were in subjection to the *Roman* government. They enjoyed, however, the free exercise of their religion, and were at liberty to follow their own laws and customs. They had a high-priest, and a council of senate; could imprison offenders, try them, and

inflict certain punishments ; but had not the power of life and death, for the governors or kings appointed by the *Romans* were the supreme judges.

Before the *Babylonish* captivity, they were exceedingly addicted to idolatry : but, after their return, corruption and superstition of a different nature prevailed over them ; they became zealous adherents to their own religion, but their attention and zeal were fixed, not on the moral and essential, but on the ritual and circumstantial part of it ; and they trusted in a punctual observance of the outward ceremonies, while they were deficient in true holiness of heart and life. They perverted also the true sense of the predictions concerning the Messiah ; and instead of spiritual blessings and a spiritual salvation, looked for a Redeemer who should free them from the *Roman* yoke, and bring all nations into subjection to the *Jewish* state.

This was the general disposition and temper of the people ; but as there were at that time several sects and parties, and persons are mentioned in the New Testament under various characters and denominations, it may be proper to prefix a short explanation of the most important.

The *Pharisees* were so called from a *Hebrew* word, which signifies to *separate* ; because they *separated* themselves from others, by stricter rules of living, and extraordinary pretences to piety ; by which means they had gained a great reputation and influence among the people. They held *the tradition of the elders* in as high esteem as the written word itself. They fasted, and prayed, and gave alms in public ; and were exceedingly conscientious in the payment of tithes, the washing of hands and cups, and the like ; while they devoured widows' houses, and neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice, fidelity, mercy, and the love of God.

The *Sadducees* took their name from *Sadoc*, the founder of the sect : they were great opposers of the *Pharisees*, rejecting all traditions : and teaching that nothing was to be imposed upon men's belief or

practice, but what was expressly contained in the law of Moses. They denied the immortality of the soul, the being of angels, and future rewards and punishments; and their lives were agreeable to that maxim, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.*


The *Scribes*, who were also called *lawyers*, or *doctors of the law*, were the principal authorized teachers, and the most learned men of the nation; it was their peculiar office to copy the original Scriptures, in order to preserve them free from error; and to interpret and expound them to the people. They were held in great repute, were closely united with the *Pharisees*, and concurred with them in most of their superstitions and corruptions.

The *Herodians* were a sect, or party, of men who distinguished themselves by their zeal for *Herod*, in vindicating his conduct, and supporting his sovereignty; and in favouring as much as possible the principles and maxims of the *Romans*, under whom he held the government. They were in this sense opposite to the *Pharisees*, who were zealous for the liberty of the nation, and thought it unlawful to pay taxes to a foreign power.

The *Publicans* were certain public officers, either *Romans* or *Jews*, employed by the governors to collect the tribute or tax imposed upon the people by the *Roman* emperor. This tax was considered by the *Jews* not only as a heavy burden and affliction in itself, but also as an insult to the honour and freedom of their nation; and the evil was much increased by the covetousness and severity of the collectors, who, having farmed the tribute at a certain yearly sum, generally exercised every method of extortion and oppression; so that the *Publicans* were universally hated, and bore such an infamous character as to be ranked, in common speech, with *sinners* and *harlots*.

The *Samaritans* were the descendants of those people who had been transplanted by the king of *Assyria* into the land of *Israel*. The *Jews* held

them in contempt and abhorrence, because they had opposed the rebuilding of the temple, and the repairing of the city under *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*; and because they had joined with some banished *Jews* in building a magnificent temple upon Mount *Gerizim*, where they had priests and sacrifices, in opposition to the temple at *Jerusalem*. Such a jealousy and animosity subsisted between the two nations, that though they inhabited almost the same country, yet they had no friendly intercourse, and constantly spoke of one another in the most reproachful terms.

 With what pity and concern must we look back upon the impiety and wickedness of the *Jews*, upon those inveterate prejudices, and that partial adherence to those narrow sects and parties, which were the causes of their rejecting the Messiah!—Banish, from our hearts, O Lord, every kind of prejudice, and cast down every imagination which exalteth itself against thy will: that we may rejoice in that *day-spring from on high, which hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.* Let us learn from his life and doctrine, to cherish that divine charity, which no national animosities nor religious differences can extinguish, and pray earnestly for that blessed time, *when all Israel shall be saved, and the fulness of the Gentiles come*; so that we and they may become one fold, under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ the righteous.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST.



When the fulness of the time was come, which had been pointed out in the ancient prophecies, and which was for several reasons the fittest for such a dispensation, God sent forth his Son. The only-begotten Son of God, who was in the beginning with

God, and was God, took upon him human nature, in a manner which we cannot fully comprehend, but is expressly revealed in God's holy word; *he was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*

Augustus, the Roman emperor, had issued a decree, that all the land of *Judea*, with its inhabitants, should be enrolled and registered, that a regular taxation might be made. Accordingly, *all went to be taxed, every one into his own city*: and *Joseph*, and *Mary* his espoused wife, being both of the tribe of *Judah*, and the family of *David*, were obliged to remove from *Nazareth* to their native city *Bethlehem*, where *Christ* was to be born. Thus the prophecy concerning the place of his birth was providentially fulfilled, and every suspicion of artifice and design effectually prevented.

The inns and houses of reception were so full upon this public occasion, that *Joseph* and *Mary* were under the necessity of lodging in a stable, where *she brought forth her first-born son, and laid him in a manger.* But an angel from heaven proclaimed the important and happy news to shepherds, *who were watching over their flocks, and a multitude of the heavenly host* rejoicing in the prospect of such an universal blessing to the human race, broke out into the triumphant hymn, *Glory to God in the highest! on earth, peace! good will towards men.*


☞ If the angels, who are fixed in a state of happiness, independent of our welfare, were so affected with this instance of Divine benevolence: surely *we*, who are the immediate objects of it, for whom the tidings of peace and good-will were intended, must feel the genuine workings of a grateful joy.—Let men and angels join in the most exalted strains to adore and praise the Father of all; for peace is made between God and man; the way is opened for every grace and mercy; for comfort and happiness in this world, for joy and glory in the next.

When the holy child was eight days old, *Joseph* and *Mary*, who were strict observers of the *Mosaic*

law, failed not to circumcise him ; which rite was the method of admission into the *Jewish Church* ; and *his name was called Jesus* ; for an angel had appeared to *Joseph*, during the pregnancy of *Mary*, in order to remove his suspicions of her virtue, and said to him, *Fear not, take unto thee Mary, thy espoused wife ; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost : and she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus* (the Saviour), *for he shall save his people from their sins.*—☞ This is the great design and end of his coming ; *he came to seek and to save that which was lost ! to bless us in turning us away from our iniquities*, and setting us free from the cruel bondage of sin and Satan ; to raise us from a wretched state of guilt to a state of peace and reconciliation with God, and to be *the author of eternal salvation to all them who obey him.*

This wonderful event was made known to some *wise men* or *philosophers of the east*, by the appearance of a bright and unusual star, which they understood as an intimation that the promised *Messiah* of the *Jews* was born. They, therefore, immediately left their country, and, under the particular guidance of the star, went first to *Jerusalem*, and from thence to *Bethlehem* : where, notwithstanding the obscurity of his parentage, and the meanness of his state, they paid their homage to the new-born king, and *presented him with gold and frankincense and myrrh.* ☞ These *wise men* were the first-fruits of the Gentiles, and have since been followed by whole kingdoms, who have gladly embraced the same faith : we too rejoice in the happy effects produced by the *star*, and bow the *knee* to Christ as our Lord. But has this day-star arisen in our *hearts* ? Has it dispelled the cloud of darkness ? Do we walk as the children of that light whereof we are made partakers ? and do we present, what is infinitely more valuable than all the treasures of the earth, even our souls and bodies, to the service of our great Redeemer ?

The appearance and character of the wise men, who were so wonderfully directed to *Jerusalem*, and who openly called the new-born infant the king of *Judea*, threw *Herod* into consternation and terror; he was led by the general expectation of a temporal prince, to consider such an event as threatening destruction to his government, and therefore resolved, by any means in his power, to destroy this supposed rival in his kingdom. When art and hypocrisy had proved ineffectual, he gave way to rage and cruelty, and made a bloody massacre of all the infants in the city of *Bethlehem*; not doubting, but that in the general destruction he should cut off the object of his jealousy and fear. *There is, however, no understanding or wisdom or counsel against the Lord.* *Joseph*, having been directed by God, before the bloody edict was issued, to take the young child and his mother into *Egypt*, immediately obeyed the heavenly command, and safely conveyed them into that country.

The inhuman tyrant was soon smitten with a terrible distemper, and died under inexpressible torments. His kingdom was divided by *Augustus* among his sons; *Archelaus* was made king of *Judea* and *Samaria*, *Herod Antipas* tetrarch of *Galilee* and *Petræa*, and *Philip* tetrarch of *Trachonitis*, and the neighbouring countries. Upon this change of government, *Joseph*, by Divine direction, removed his family into the region of *Galilee*, and dwelt at *Nazareth*. The distance of their habitation, however, did not prevent them from going yearly to *Jerusalem*, at the feast of the Passover; and when *Jesus* arrived at the age of twelve years, they thought it proper to take him with them for his instruction.  A striking example to parents, that they should constantly attend the public worship of God, and lead their children by the hand into the paths of devotion and piety.


When they had performed the usual ceremonies of the feast, and were returning home, the child

Jesus, anxious for improvement in religious knowledge, went into one of the rooms of the temple, where the *doctors of the law* expounded it to the people, and instructed youth in free and familiar conferences. He heard their discourses with eager attention ; and both in his questions and answers discovered such marks of wisdom, as filled his hearers with a transport of admiration. Upon his return to *Nazareth* he was educated with great care by *Joseph* and *Mary*, and increased in wisdom as well as in age and stature ; he continued in silent subjection to his parents, and probably laboured in a servile, low, employment, for the maintenance of them, as well as himself, for nearly thirty years ; till his obedience to his heavenly Father demanded all his attention, and the time came for his entering on his public ministry. ¶ Let me fix my eye upon this instance of humility and submission to parents, and strive to imitate the amiable example. Can I see my Saviour in the character of a dutiful and obedient child, and yet be stubborn and disobedient myself? What shall I say to him, when he comes to judge me, if I disregard my father and mother, and neglect their just commands? Guide me by thy grace, O Lord, that I may always behave towards them with fervent affection and filial reverence, and gratefully study, by all the means in my power, to support and comfort them under the troubles of life and the infirmities of age.

John, the son of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, appeared as the forerunner of the Messiah, (according to the prophets *Malachi* and *Isaiah*,) to prepare the way of the Lord, by preaching the baptism of repentance ; and, from this office was surnamed the Baptist. He went from place to place throughout all the country about *Jordan*, and preached *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* ; the kingdom of righteousness and glory, which the God of heaven has erected and put into the hands of his Son, the long-expected Messiah. When great numbers of the people had been brought by his preaching to a conviction of their

sins, and had been baptized by him, *Jesus* also, being now about thirty years of age, and entering on his ministry, went to *John*, and was baptized by him in the river *Jordan* : upon which occasion the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God descended upon him with a hovering motion, after the manner of a dove: and an awful voice issued from heaven, saying, *Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.*

As soon as he was baptized, he retired to a solitary wilderness, to prepare himself, by meditation and prayer, for that important office which he came into the world to execute. There the Devil, *that great deceiver*, putting on a human appearance, attacked him with the most powerful temptations ; for *he was in all points tempted like as we are* ; but he stood firm to virtue, and gave full proof of his trust in God, and submission to his will : he rejected every temptation, and nobly triumphed over the seducer and destroyer of mankind.

 It is to be observed that our Saviour repelled the various assaults of the tempter by the word of God. *This is the sword of the Spirit* : this is the armour of a Christian. Read, study, treasure it up in the memory and in the heart, that you may readily apply it upon all occasions. Without this you fight naked and defenceless ; but thus armed, you *will fight the good fight of faith, and be able to withstand in the day of trial, and having done all, to stand. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

The rulers of the *Jews* had some doubt whether *John* was the promised *Messiah*, or not ; but being examined by the priests, he frankly acknowledged *I am not the Christ* : and the next day, as *Jesus* was coming towards him, *John* pointed him out to his disciples, saying, *Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world* ; alluding to the lamb, the sacrifice offered daily in the temple. Upon this several persons followed Christ as his disciples, and their faith in him was soon confirmed by the miracle of his changing water into wine at a marriage-feast.

The feast of the Passover drawing near, *Jesus* went up to *Jerusalem* to worship ; where, observing the outward court of the temple turned into a kind of market-place, he reformed the abuse, by resolutely driving away the buyers and sellers. From thence he passed through *Samaria* and *Galilee* ; and travelled about the country, preaching the word of the kingdom of God, and spreading the blessings of health and peace all around him.

John the Baptist continued to proclaim the necessity of repentance, and to prepare the people for the reception of Christ. *Herod*, the tetrarch, heard him often with attention and pleasure, and paid much regard to his precepts. But when the prophet, with honest freedom, attacked his favourite vice, and reproved him for living in adultery with his brother *Philip's* wife, the king, instead of profiting by the reproof, imprisoned the reprover. His unlawful passion gained still more power over him, and led him from one crime to another, till he actually caused his innocent teacher to be murdered. But from that moment his peace was gone : the terrors of guilt, armed with vengeance, came upon him : and his mind was thrown into such agony and confusion, that when he heard of the fame of *Jesus*, he wildly imagined that *it was John the Baptist risen from the dead*, on purpose to accuse and condemn him.—Observe the unhappy influence and dreadful effects of one darling lust : and if you have obtained to such a degree of obedience that only one thing is lacking, oh, do not suffer one single vice to rob you of your present peace and future happiness ! Tear it from your heart, though it be as dear to you as a right eye ; and give to God the full possession of your soul, without any rival or competitor.

As the light of the gospel was to be diffused throughout the world, and salvation to be offered to all mankind, (for *from the rising of the sun, to the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts,*) our Saviour

chose twelve persons from among his disciples, whom he called *Apostles* (*special messengers or ambassadors*), to be his witnesses, and the founders of his church; to preach his doctrines, and to appoint a succession of ministers to that sacred office. When he had gradually revealed to them the grievous sufferings he was to undergo, and explained the nature of his kingdom, he thought it proper to give them a short glimpse of his glorified state in heaven; and therefore took *Peter, James, and John* (who were sufficient witnesses of the fact) to a high mountain: where, as *he prayed, he was transfigured*: that is, *the fashion, or appearance, of his countenance was altered; his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light, white and glistening.* *Moses and Elias (Elijah)*, the two most remarkable and distinguished prophets under the Old Testament, appeared also in glory, and conversed with him concerning his deep humiliation and ignominious death, to which he was soon to submit for our sakes. While they were thus conversing, *a cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice came out of the cloud which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*; with whose undertaking and conduct, as Mediator for the redemption of mankind, I am highly delighted: *Hear ye him.* Hear the Lord Jesus Christ, the beloved Son of God: hear the important message which he brought from heaven: hear and obey the laws which he inculcated: hear and embrace the condescending offer of pardon and salvation, which he hath made to a lost world.

While our blessed Lord remained in an obscure condition at *Nazareth*, he avoided all censure and reproach; but as soon as he discovered himself, and excited the attention and admiration of the people by his doctrine and miracles, the prejudices of the rulers were awakened, and a spirit of opposition was stirred up, which continually increased in proportion as his fame increased. They were offended at those very things which were strong arguments of his


divine mission: the poverty of his circumstances, his free method of reproving vice and exposing hypocrisy, the unspotted purity of his manners, and his meek self-denying doctrines. Being apprehensive, however, that if he proceeded as he had done, he would draw all the people after him, to the prejudice of their reputation and dignity, they united their voice and interest against him, and laboured by all means to destroy his authority and influence.

They endeavoured at first to depreciate his character by little malicious reflections on the meanness of his parentage, and the place of his residence, as if such circumstances were inconsistent with the title of the Messiah. But in reality a state of poverty was agreeable to that character: not only as it had been foretold by the prophets, but as it gave our Lord an opportunity of exercising the most difficult virtues; and was most effectual towards promoting the design of the gospel, and endearing his memory to the world.

They studied also to ensnare him in his discourses, and tried, by artful questions, to draw something from him upon which they might ground an accusation. The *Scribes* and *Pharisees* asked him, *by what authority he acted*, as a public instructor and reformer? the *Herodians* inquired of him, *whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar or not?* and the *Sadducees* proposed to him some doubtful, speculative, points concerning the resurrection and a future state. But he *perceived their craft and wickedness*, for *he knew what was in man*; and though he was ready to resolve every doubt of the candid and sincere, he would not gratify the impertinent humour of every insidious inquirer. When he was pleased to give answers to their questions, he joined *the wisdom of the serpent with the innocence of the dove*; and, while he gave them no advantage over him, sent them away amazed at the quickness of his invention, confounded with the power of his arguments, and ashamed at their disappointment.

When they murmured against him, for eating and conversing with men of mean characters, and represented him as a *glutton and wine-bibber, a friend to publicans and sinners*; he vindicated his conduct by telling them, that *he came to call sinners to repentance, and that the whole have no need of a physician, but the sick.*

When they accused him of impiety, and the breach of the fourth commandment, because he *healed the sick, and relieved the distressed, on the Sabbath-day*, he refuted the charge with great propriety and force of reason; *Doth not every one of you loose his ox from the stall on the Sabbath, and lead it to the water? And may not your fellow-creatures then, who are bound with infirmities, be loosed, and set free from them on the Sabbath?—Again, who among you, if his sheep should fall in a pit on the Sabbath, would not immediately lift him out? and how much is a man better than a sheep!—But if you had known the meaning and intent of that declaration of God, by the prophets, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, (I always prefer the offices of humanity and benevolence to external observations and matters of positive institution,) you would not have condemned the innocent and guiltless.*

 What a dreadful thing is a perverse and obstinate temper, which is offended with the truth, hardens itself against admonition, and is determined to resist the strongest motives of piety and humanity! Yet such was the temper of the *Jewish rulers*: they were obstinately incurable: they withstood the best instructions, the most powerful persuasions, and the strongest evidence; and discovered, in their opposition to our Saviour, an unconquerable prejudice and malignity of mind. When, therefore, the time of his ministry was nearly accomplished, and he was ready to finish all that remained for him to do, by yielding himself up to death; he openly and without reserve declaimed against their incorrigible wickedness, and applied

to them the words of the prophet *Isaiah* : *This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed ; that they might not see and hear, and be converted and healed.* He denounced judgment against them, and described the calamitous destruction which was soon to be brought upon their state and city.


In this situation, they thought themselves reduced to the necessity, either of destroying him utterly, or of giving up their own authority : therefore they resolved to proceed to the utmost height of malice, and accordingly sent officers to seize him. But they, while they were waiting for a favourable pretence or opportunity to execute their purpose, were disarmed of the intention by his excellent conversation and doctrine ; and, instead of offering any violence to him, returned to their masters with this honourable testimony, *Never man spake like this man.*

Thus disappointed, the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* held a solemn debate concerning the most effectual means of apprehending and putting him to death : in the midst of their consultation, *Judas*, one of the apostles, entered, and put an end to their doubts, by promising, that for a sum of money he would betray him into their hands. The officers were accordingly conducted by him to a private place, whither Jesus was retired for prayer ; and, having secured him, brought him before the Sanhedrim, that is, the grand council of the nation. He was there charged with blasphemy, for calling himself *the Son of God*, and assuming the title of the *Messiah* ; and when he made an open confession of the truth, they unanimously pronounced him guilty, and condemned him to death.

The next morning they led him away to *Pilate*, who was at that time the *Roman* governor, and to whom the power of life and death belonged. *Pilate* knew that for envy they had delivered him ; and being convinced, upon examination, of his inno-

cence, declared publicly, that *he found in him no fault at all*; and tried by several expedients to release him. The *Jews*, however, still pressed for a sentence against him, and vehemently cried out, *Crucify him, crucify him*: they represented that *they had a law in force, according to which he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God*;—that their religious constitution was brought into danger by him; that he was a mover of sedition; and that *Pilate* could not regard the peace of the province, and *be a friend to Cæsar, if he let such a man go*. *Pilate*, being afraid that disturbances and tumults would arise, if he did not hearken to the *Jews*, yielded to their importunity: *when he saw that he could prevail nothing, he took water, and having washed his hands before the multitude, said, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it. Then answered all the people, His blood be on us, and on our children.*

Nothing can possibly be more affecting than the account of our Saviour's last sufferings. He was persecuted and condemned as a malefactor and blasphemer, by those whom he came to befriend and save: they buffeted and scourged him; they arrayed him with a scarlet robe, and when they had platted a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, *Hail, king of the Jews*. Others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying unto him, *Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee?*—They then led him to the place of crucifixion; they nailed his hands and his feet to a cross, between two thieves; they made him the object of their scorn and derision, while he was hanging on the tree; and interrupted his dying groans and agonies with their bitter sarcasms and malicious reproaches.

 *No man could take his life from him; he laid it down of himself.* In compliance with the glorious designs of infinite wisdom and love, he submitted

cheerfully to the most grievous sufferings, and to death itself, that he might make atonement for our sins, and obtain eternal redemption for us. *He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. He suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God.—God made him who knew no sin, to be sin (a sin-offering), that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, that we might be accepted through him, as if we were perfectly righteous.* Thus the covenant of grace, offering to us the riches of Divine mercy, upon the condescending terms of a sincere repentance, a lively faith, and a renewed obedience, is established; and we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DOCTRINES OF CHRIST.

THE doctrines of our Saviour are far superior to those of any other instructor. It may be truly said, *He spake as never man spake.* He taught as a teacher sent from God. He laid down the most excellent principles of religion and virtue; he enjoined the purest and most perfect discipline; he offered the most powerful assistance, and held up to view the most noble rewards.

He teaches us *to love the Lord our God with all the heart, and with all the soul;* and inspires the very temper which he recommends, by giving just and worthy notions of the Deity. He directs us to *worship Him in spirit and in truth,* with unaffected piety and devotion; to resign ourselves wholly to his will, to cast all our care upon him, and to obey sincerely all his commandments.

With respect to the *social* duties, he teacheth us not only to abstain from doing any injury to others, either in their persons, their fortune, or their reputation; but to perform the various offices of justice

and fidelity, and *to love our neighbour* (that is, every man) *as ourselves*; to promote his welfare and happiness with disinterested affection; to be kind and charitable to all men, of whatever nation or profession; to do to others as we would expect or desire, in reason or conscience, that they should do to us.

With regard to the duties which we owe to *ourselves*, he teaches us to purify the heart, which is the fountain of life; to mortify our corrupt appetites and passions, and live in temperance and chastity; to disclaim all proud, self-conceited thoughts, and to put on humility and lowliness of mind; to lay aside all anxious and distrustful solicitude about temporal events; to set our affections on things above, and *to lay up for ourselves those treasures which are incorruptible and eternal*.

The *motives* which he hath set before us, in order to animate us to the performance of these duties, are the most powerful and engaging which can be offered to the heart of man. He hath opened the counsels of infinite wisdom and goodness for the salvation of sinners, and promised mercy and forgiveness to all them who repent and believe the Gospel; an assurance no less effectual than it was necessary, to cherish that beginning of repentance, and confirm the resolutions of a better obedience for the future. He hath also promised the assistance of his Holy Spirit, to strengthen our feeble powers, to enlighten our understandings, and to support and comfort us in the faithful discharge of our duty. And, lastly, he hath made an ample discovery of a future state, and clearly represented the awful process of the general judgment, when all who have ever lived upon earth shall stand before his high tribunal: when rewards and punishments shall be distributed *according to what men have done in the body, whether it be good or evil: when the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal*.

Can we conceive any motives of equal weight and dignity with these? Are they not well adapted to stir up the active powers of our nature, and awaken those affections which have the greatest influence upon our lives?—If these do not prevail with us, what can prevail?—If we reject these encouragements, and remain impenitent and unreformed, what can prevent our final ruin! Let us therefore give due attention to them; let us impress them upon our hearts and consciences; and, complying with the designs of the Gospel grace, let us become the genuine disciples of Christ, both in principle and practice, *leading a godly, righteous, and sober life, and looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

OF all the discourses which our Saviour preached, the Sermon on the Mount (so called from his sitting on a hill or mountain, when he spake it) is the fullest and most complete: and, as every Christian ought to copy the precepts of it into his heart and life, we cannot too frequently apply our thoughts and meditations to it, and especially to the following passages.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn for their sins, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Let your light—the light of your doctrine and example—so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and be thereby engaged to glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets ; I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it—to illustrate—to adorn—to perfect it: and except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

If thy right eye offend thee, by leading thee into sin, pluck it out, and cast it from thee ; and if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee ; that is, sacrifice every passion, however beloved, which comes in competition with your duty: though it be as difficult to part with it as to part with a hand or an eye, yet give it up, renounce it; for it is profitable for thee, that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

Love your enemies ; bless them who curse you : do good to them who hate you : and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you : that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven ; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good ; and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

When thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth ; that thy alms may be in secret: and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.—And when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret: and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal ; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth

corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Take no thought—be not over-anxious—saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? for our heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Judge not, that ye may not be judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For, if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, who is in heaven, give good things unto them that ask him.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing; but inwardly are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits; for every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock, and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand, and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

Let us receive the law from the mouth of Christ, and delight in it after the inward man. Let us not only read and admire his precepts, but love and practise them. Let us cherish all those graces and virtues which he recommends, and build our hopes upon that Rock which will never fail.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE PARABLES OF CHRIST.

There are two ways of communicating knowledge and instruction :—by plain and direct precepts, of which the greatest part of the Sermon on the Mount consists ; and by moral similitudes or fables, such as the parables which our Saviour used in order to recommend his doctrines, and enforce their duty upon men. The advantages of conveying instruction by parables are very obvious ; it is an easy method of insinuating truth into the mind ; it takes men by surprise, without alarming their prejudices and passions ; it is less offensive than a plain, open, rebuke ; and it is fitted to make a deeper impression on the memory and the heart.

The parables of our Lord far exceed those of all other writers, not only on account of the peculiar beauty and excellence of their composition, but also on account of the sublime truths and important instructions which are contained in them.

The Parable of the Sower shews the different receptions which the Gospel meets with in the world, according to the different tempers and capacities of men.

That of the Tares shews the general state of the christian church, in all ages, to the end of the world ; that there will be both sincere and hypocritical professors, and at last an impartial trial and an eternal distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

The Rich Man, whose soul was suddenly required of him, sets in a very striking light the folly of placing our chief happiness in worldly riches, and flattering ourselves with the hope of many years to come.

The charitable Samaritan melts the soul into universal benevolence, and throws down every partition-wall, which would prevent us from doing good to others.

The parable of the Prodigal paints in lively colours

the folly and guilt of a licentious youth, who, being impatient of his father's advice and discipline, runs headlong into a course of sensual pleasure; but soon found, instead of liberty and happiness, the most abject slavery and most bitter distress: and it represents further, in an affecting manner, that *God hath no pleasure in the death of sinners*, but rejoiceth in their recovery, and is ready with open arms to receive them, upon their returning to him with sincere repentance.

The parables in general are full of religious and moral instructions; but it would swell this work too much to give a particular account of all.—Read them with attention and candour, and endeavour to discover the spiritual wisdom and good sentiments which are concealed in them; consider their particular meaning and design; the main object and leading point in view; and bring the application home to your own mind; that you may not be numbered among those, *who seeing, saw not; and hearing, heard not; but having, with an honest and good heart, heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*

N. B. Children should be brought into an early acquaintance with the design and meaning of the Parables; and should get by heart the most lively and affecting of them.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

OUR blessed Lord not only laid down a perfect rule of duty in his excellent discourses and parables; but also set before us an example of the most complete obedience. His practice was a just picture of his own precepts, and added new light and force to them. All the duties of piety and goodness were united in him, without infirmity or defect; so that in his life they appeared, as it were, visible to human eyes.

His piety and devotion towards God were manifested in a constant readiness to please and honour

him in all things. He speaks of it as the great object of his attention, and the highest joy of his soul. *I am come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.* At twelve years of age, he discovered his zeal for religious exercises, by staying in the temple amongst the doctors, *hearing them and asking them questions*; and telling his parents in justification of his conduct, *that he must be about his Father's business.* He constantly attended the public assemblies for divine worship; and frequently withdrew himself from the public eye, for meditation and private prayer. This spirit of devotion influenced all his actions, and was the foundation of that absolute subjection and resignation to the Divine will, which he shewed at all times, and especially in the amazing instance of his death, the finishing-stroke and highest proof of his obedience and love.

Nor was he less exemplary in benevolence towards man, than in piety towards God. His whole life was one continued act of mercy. It was his meat and drink, his constant employment and delight, *to go about doing good*; to heal all sorts of sicknesses among the people, and to preach the glad tidings of Divine grace and favour to the penitent. He admitted all, even the poorest and meanest, into his presence; and conversed freely with publicans and sinners, for their instruction and amendment. He discovered the generous feelings of humanity, and the tender affection of friendship, in his sympathising tears at the grave of *Lazarus*, in his last endearing discourses to his disciples, and in his pathetic lamentation over *Jerusalem*: but the act of benevolence which deserves our highest regard is, *his dying for the ungodly, giving his life a ransom for many; the offering of himself a sacrifice for sinful men, that he might obtain eternal redemption for them.*

The virtues also of self-government eminently shone forth in the temper and conduct of our Saviour. His affections and appetites moved regularly within

the bounds of reason : and he preferred the pleasures of religion to every other pleasure. Every desire of private ease was made to give way to the public good, and to the great design he had in view. He pursued the middle path between luxury and austerity; teaching us to sit loose to the enjoyments of life, and to *use the world without abusing it*. He was all humility and condescension, yet always preserved his dignity; and washed the feet of his disciples, while he told them he was their Lord and Master. Far from coveting worldly riches or honours, in the lowest condition of poverty and meanness he was easy and contented : and under the most injurious treatment, and the greatest possible provocations, we find no unbecoming transports of impatience and anger : far from losing his meekness and benevolence of temper, even when he was expiring upon the cross, he offered up his prayers for those who with inveterate cruelty had brought him to it, saying, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

Let us set this example constantly before our eyes; trace the sacred history of it, and make it the subject of our frequent thoughts and repeated contemplation, that we may catch some faint image and resemblance of his graces, and that *the same mind may be in us which was in Christ Jesus*.—May we imitate him as his disciples, obey him as our Master, and follow him as our Guide : with a comfortable persuasion and pleasing hope of following him to the blessed mansions above, and gaining *an abundant entrance into the possession of immortal life and glory.* Amen.



CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE PROPHECIES CONCERNING CHRIST.

A PROPHECY is a declaration of some future event, which it is impossible for man to know ; and as therefore it must come from God, the accom-


plishment of the prophecies concerning Christ was a mark by which he should be known, and a proof of his divine mission. A series of prophecies had been delivered by different prophets, and at different times, through a long succession of ages, which were fulfilled in him, and in him alone. The history of his life and death is only a repetition of them; and the Old and New Testament entirely agree, the former in foretelling what should happen to him, and the latter in relating those very circumstances as they really happened.

It was foretold that the *Messiah* should be born of a virgin, of the tribe of *Judah*, of the house of *David*, and in the town of *Bethlehem*: and all the prophecies, thus pointing out the family, the place, and the manner of his birth, exactly came to pass.—It was foretold by *Haggai*, that he would come while the second temple was standing; and by *Daniel*, that he would be *cut off*, and the city and sanctuary be destroyed at the end of seventy weeks from the going forth of the command (which was given to *Ezra*) to *restore and rebuild Jerusalem*;—that is, at the end of four hundred and ninety years from that period: for the weeks are weeks of years; each week containing seven years, like the *sabbaths of years* mentioned in the twenty-first chapter of *Leviticus*. And accordingly, at that time Christ was *cut off to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness*; and upon his death the Mosaic economy was abolished, the sacrifice and oblation ceased, the *Jews* were no longer a peculiar people, and *Jerusalem* was no longer a holy city unto God.

Several minute circumstances also, which had been specified by the prophets, were punctually accomplished: and if you compare them with the Evangelists, you will see that not a tittle fell to the ground. You read in *Zechariah*, *they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver*; and you read in *St. Matthew*, that *Judas* sold *Jesus* for that very

sum.—You read in the *Psalms*, that *they pierced both his hands and his feet*; and you read in the Gospel that he *was crucified*: and that he afterwards shewed his disciples *the print of the nails*, with which he had been fastened to the cross.—Isaiah foretold that *he should be numbered with transgressors*; and the Evangelist tells you that *he was crucified between two thieves*.

As Christ, therefore, appeared exactly at the time appointed by the prophets for his coming; and as the various marks and characters, which they had given of him, are found to agree and unite in him, and in no other, we have good reason to believe that he was the Messiah, who was to come into the world; and to be thankful for this great evidence of the divine authority of his mission, and of the truth of his religion.

By the prophecies concerning Christ, the expectation of him was continually preserved among the *Jews*: they, who had but a distant and imperfect view of his coming, rejoiced at it: and under all their troubles and calamities they drew comfort from the promise of a *Saviour, of whose kingdom there should be no end. Unto this promise, the twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hoped to come.*— We should learn to act over again the same virtue with the saints of old; and as they saw the promises of God afar off, and yet embraced them, so we should look up to God, as true and firm to his engagements, and worthy of our entire trust and confidence. We should rely upon his promises, which relate to a future state, we should prepare ourselves for the second coming of Christ, and fix our eye on that blessed inheritance which is reserved in heaven for his faithful servants. Let us bring down the distant good into our hearts; let us shew the influence of it in our lives: and by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, after we have done the will of God, that we may inherit the promises.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST.

As a prophecy is the declaration of some future event which it is impossible for man to know ; so a miracle is an action which it is above the natural power of man to perform. It cannot be accounted for by the common course of Providence, and the known laws of nature, and must therefore be done by the immediate assistance of Him to whom Nature herself owes her being. *We know*, said Nicodemus, *a ruler of the Jews*, to Jesus, *thou art a teacher come from God ; for no man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him.*

All marks and characters, which may be naturally expected in true and genuine miracles, are to be found in those done by Christ.—They were very numerous ; they were various in their kind ; and were very frequently repeated. They were wrought openly, in the face of the sun, before a whole nation of witnesses, who were his enemies. They were all likewise of the compassionate and friendly kind ;—as of supernatural power, so of God-like beneficence ; perfectly agreeing with the design of his coming into the world, and with the doctrine which they were intended to support.

Look into the Gospel, and you will find him speaking as the Lord of nature, and having all the powers of nature at his command. He spake the word only, and instantly the sick were restored to health, the blind received sight, the lame were made to walk, the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.—*I will, be thou clean*, said he to the leper, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed :—*Peace, be still*, said he to the stormy wind and the raging sea, and immediately the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He spake to the dead daughter of Jairus, *Damsel, I say unto thee, arise*, and she arose.—He called to Lazarus, *Come forth*, and he who had lain four days in the grave came forth.

But the miracles which are recorded in the New Testament are but a small part of the whole number which our Saviour performed. There were many others equally credible and authentic; too many, indeed, to be distinctly related; and therefore we frequently meet with only general accounts of great numbers performed in this or that place, without any mention of the particular circumstances or objects. Thus we read in St. Matthew, *Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people: and his fame went through Syria. And they brought unto him all sick people, that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those which had the palsy: and he healed them.* And again, *When the men of that place (namely, Genesaret) had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased, and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment. And as many as touched were made perfectly whole.*

How pleasing to survey such multitudes of our fellow-creatures receiving immediate comfort from the miraculous power of our Saviour! How do we partake of the joy which he diffused through many a mournful family, by restoring a sick parent to health, or raising a dead child to life! And how do these reflections cherish and improve our own benevolence, and inspire and animate the love of doing good!

How pleasing also to consider the miracles of Christ, as immediate attestations from the Father to the truth of his mission, and to the divinity of his doctrine! He himself appeals to them upon this very ground. *If I do not the works of my Father, such works as no man can do, except God be with him, believe me not: but if I do, though you believe not me, merely on my own word and testi-*

mony, yet *believe the works*,—which are the testimony of God, and which I do by his power and in his name;—*that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me*—by the divine power of working miracles,—*and I in him*—as having his commission, knowing his will, and acting by his authority.

Would God have recommended the doctrines of the Gospel by his immediate interposition, if they had not been true, and promotive of the happiness of man? Would he thus have set his own peculiar seal to them? Would he, by such a special voice, have borne witness to Christ, and called upon all men to believe in and obey him, if he had not been indeed the Messiah, the Saviour of the world?

Let these considerations establish our minds in the christian faith, and lead us to the grand designs of the Gospel; in confirmation of which the miracles of Christ were wrought. The great aim and intention of Christianity is to bring us to repentance, to purify and warm the heart, to restore that image of God which was defaced by the fall, and to create us unto all good works. Submit, then, to the authority of Christ, embrace his doctrine, follow his example, and obey his precepts; for *how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, who was a man approved of God, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of the people.*

CHAPTER L.

THE SACRAMENTS.

THE christian religion is an institution of great plainness and simplicity; yet, as men forming a religious society must have some outward rites of worship, and as proper emblems and representations naturally tend to promote meditation, and excite devotion, our Saviour has required the

observance of two positive rites, commonly known by the name of the Sacraments, and called Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism consists in washing or sprinkling the body with water, *in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*: and the outward form is the sign of an inward and spiritual grace. It is a memorial of that *purity* of mind, and manners, which, as Christians, we are bound to preserve. And as water, the emblem of purity, is in daily, constant, use, it may bring to our mind, every hour we live, the obligations of our Baptism, and teach us to keep our souls and bodies untainted with any moral impurity.

We are solemnly admitted by it into the profession of the christian faith, and are bound to live suitably to that profession. We therein dedicate ourselves—to the service and worship of God the Father, who created us;—to the obedience and imitation of Christ the Son of God, who redeemed us;—and to the doctrine and guidance of the Holy Spirit, who sanctified us. We become, according to the christian covenant, entitled to the benefits and privileges which God has promised on his part; we are made members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven; and we are bound to fulfil the conditions or obligations on our part; which are—First, to renounce all sin and wickedness;—Secondly, To believe what God has taught in his holy word;—and Thirdly, To keep his commandments all the days of our lives.

It is true, indeed, that infants cannot of themselves expressly promise to fulfil these conditions: but their sureties, their Godfathers and Godmothers, promise for them; and, if the parents neglect it, are bound to instruct them in the Articles of the christian faith, and the nature of the christian duties, that they may believe and obey the will of God. And as soon as they come to years of discretion, and understand the nature and obligation

of that promise which was made in their names at their Baptism, they must choose for themselves; they must either renounce and disclaim it, or approve and confirm it, making it their own act and deed, and resolving to abide by it. For this purpose the ceremony of *Confirmation* was instituted; an ancient usage, handed down to us from the beginning of Christianity, and capable, if duly observed, of producing the most noble fruits. For what can be more likely to preserve young persons from the snares and dangers of the world, than to renew the baptismal covenant; to take it freely upon themselves, and form a serious resolution of keeping it to the end of their lives? What a warm and lasting impression must it make upon their minds, thus to surrender themselves entirely to God in the face of the Church, and before a large congregation, while the Bishop lays his hand upon the head of each, and solemnly prays that God may *defend them with his heavenly grace; that they may continue his children for ever, and daily increase in his Holy Spirit, till they come to his everlasting kingdom!* And will not the sense of the vows which are upon them strengthen them afterwards in an hour of temptation, spur them on to every good work, and excite a becoming zeal in preparing themselves for the complete communion of the Church, and the participation of the Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper was instituted for the continual remembrance of the death of Christ: we eat bread in remembrance of his body broken, and we drink wine in token of the shedding of his blood, that thus his death may be represented and shown forth till he come again for the final salvation of his people.

It is the express direction of our Saviour, *Do this, in remembrance of me.*—The words carry a plain obligation with them, which no Christian can evade: they contain as clear a command as any other precept in the whole New Testament. And


did Christ give this command without intending that it should be obeyed? Did he leave us at liberty to attend or not attend to it? And can we have the courage to tell him, that though he thought it necessary to command it, we did not think it necessary to comply with it?

What less can we do, as a mark of our love and gratitude? Did he divest himself of all his glory in heaven; did he take upon himself our nature, with all its pains and infirmities; did he submit to the agonies of a bitter death, that we might be pardoned, reconciled, and live for ever? And what less return can we make than to eat and drink at his table in remembrance of him?—Though we never can sufficiently praise that compassion which hath thus ransomed us from sin and death, yet let us gratefully remember it: let us admire and adore it: let us keep a warm sense of it always in the heart, and do what we can to convey the remembrance of it to all future ages.

But it is an institution calculated for our good; and our interest calls us to a frequent attendance upon it. It hath a powerful influence to confirm our faith, to strengthen our good resolutions, to arm us against the temptations of life, and to improve us in every thing that is worthy of men and of Christians. While we contemplate the riches and freedom of Divine mercy, and cherish those dispositions of mind which are suited to the solemnity, the world loses its power over us: every inordinate passion is subdued: the love of virtue glows in the breast; and we feel that fervour of devotion, that purity of soul, and that energy of joy, which are the emblem and the foretaste of heaven.

There is no limitation of age for persons coming to the Lord's Supper:—it is indeed impossible, on account of the different capacities and opportunities of improvement, to fix a certain precise time of life for that purpose; but you ought to come as soon as you are capable of understanding the nature

of the institution. You ought to come as soon as you are fit for it, at whatever age it be;—the sooner the better.—Early attendance is peculiarly pleasing to God; he will bless the youthful pursuits of virtue; he will smile upon the young who present themselves at his table, and treat them with distinguishing favour. *They shall be his in the day when he maketh up his jewels; their names are written in heaven.*

 Blessed Saviour, I own thy love: I submit to thy command: I am determined to remember thee in thy holy Supper. I resolve to go soon to thine altar; and there, in the most unreserved manner, to *present myself a holy living sacrifice unto thee*, and renew my covenant never to be broken. I resolve to follow thee as my Pattern, to obey thee as my Master, and to confide in thee as my all-powerful Mediator. May I receive with becoming dispositions of mind, the pledges of thy love, and the memorials of thy death; and under their sacred influence, may I go on, as far as I can, to *perfect holiness in the fear of God*, and be at length received into the habitations of eternal righteousness and peace!

CHAPTER LI.

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

OUR Saviour having died upon the cross, was buried by *Joseph of Arimathea*, in a new tomb, which had been hewn out of a rock, and in which never man was laid: and as he had foretold, that *after three days he would rise again*, the chief priests and rulers of the *Jews*, in order to prevent any deception and imposition, *made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch*. But, notwithstanding all their precaution, on the third day the seal was broken, the stone rolled away, and the body of Jesus was gone. He rose in the presence, and to the great amazement of the *Roman guard*, who

shook and became as dead men : some of whom, after they had recollected themselves, went into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the particular circumstances of this awful transaction.

Our Lord appeared to his disciples after he was risen, not once only, but often ; not in a transient way, but for a considerable time altogether : he travelled with them ; discoursed with them ; ate and drank with them ; shewed them his hands and his feet, and the marks of those wounds which he had received on the cross : and when one of them refused to believe on the testimony of the rest, and required a particular kind of conviction, he condescended to satisfy his over-scrupulous disciple, saying unto him, *Reach hither thy finger, and behold and examine my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing.*

When he had fully convinced the Apostles, *by many infallible proofs*, of the reality of his resurrection, and given them all necessary directions for the discharge of their office, he led them out to *Bethany* ; where, while he was in the midst of them, instructing and blessing them, he was parted from them ; and while they beheld him, and their eyes were fixed on him, he was carried up by a slow, gradual, ascent, till a bright cloud received him out of their sight. Thus he ascended into heaven, where he sat down at the right hand of God ; that is, *was crowned with glory and honour, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.* There he still carries on, as our great High-Priest, the gracious design for which he came into the world, *and ever liveth to make intercession for us.* There he reigns the animating though invisible head of the Church, which he founded upon earth, and which he will cherish and support *even to the end of the world.* And from thence he will return with power and glory, to judge the whole human race, and to dispense the blessings of eternity.

The resurrection and ascension of our blessed Lord fully vindicate the integrity of his character ; justify his claim as the Son of God and Saviour of the world ; and prove the truth and efficacy of his whole mediation. With what pleasure, therefore, should we remember a risen and exalted Redeemer ! With what satisfaction may we put ourselves under his protection ! With what entire confidence may we rest in his promises ! *I am going*, says he, *to prepare a place for you ; that where I am, there ye may be also. Because I live, ye shall live also.*

Meditate upon these truths with grateful adoration and praise ; let them have their genuine influence in purifying the heart from every low, earthborn desire, and in forming you to a divine and heavenly temper. Remember that Jesus, though crucified and slain, *lives at the right hand of God* to plead your cause. Go, and remember the Almighty Power which raised him from the dead, *and exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour.* Go, rise with him, and *walk in newness of life : set your affections on things above : have your conversation in heaven : and rest assured, that, He, who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, will shew you the path of life ;* and that, *when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

CHAPTER LII.

THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

As our Saviour knew that his death would overwhelm his apostles with dread and despair, and that they could not, without some special aid, be qualified for preaching the Gospel with success, and carrying on his gracious purposes for the salvation of men ; he previously animated them with an encouraging promise of assistance, requisite for all their future engagements ; and most affectionately told them, *I will not leave you comfortless ; for after*

I am risen from the dead, and ascended to the place from whence I came, I will pray to my Father, and he shall give you another Comforter. And when he is come, he will guide you into all truth: he will shew you things to come: he will bring to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you: he will teach you all things, and abide with you for ever. And just before his ascension, being assembled together with his apostles, he commanded them, that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but should remain there for the promise of the Father;—for the accomplishment of that promise which he had made them in his Father's name. Ye shall receive power (saith Christ) after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

Accordingly, about ten days after his ascension, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, and they were all with one accord in one place, there came suddenly a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, (tongues which seemed to be divided in the midst, and were bright and sparkling like fire;) and this emblem of the Divine Spirit sat upon each of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost, or Spirit, is a being distinct from the Father and the Son: he is of the Father and of the Son, proceeding from them both. The Sacred Scriptures speak of him as another person, and ascribe to him all sorts of personal characters and properties: they also join him with the Father and the Son, on equal terms, and represent him as partaking of the same authority and perfections, and therefore of the same nature with them. This is the language of our Saviour to his apostles, *Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy*


Ghost.—To the same purpose is that apostolical benediction, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.*

In consequence of this divine effusion, the Holy Spirit, immediately upon his descent from heaven, undertook the important office of *Guide and Comforter* to the apostles. He inspired them with the knowledge of all languages, so that men of every nation under heaven, heard them speak in their own tongue the wonderful works of God. He gave them power to inculcate the doctrines of the gospel with such force of reasoning, as all their adversaries could not gainsay or resist; and also to confirm their authority by many signs and wonders, by divers miracles and spiritual gifts. And he fortified their minds with so much courage and patience, that they resolved to submit to shame, persecution, and every kind of distress which could possibly befall them, rather than desert the cause of Christ, and renounce his religion.

The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were only for a time; they were bestowed upon the apostles and first preachers of Christianity, for the confirmation and establishment of the truth: and when this end was answered, when Christianity was grown from a state of infancy to full vigour and maturity, and princes became the patrons of it, then these temporary aids of *tongues, prophecies, and miracles*, were taken away. But, besides those miraculous powers, which were communicated only to some few, there is an influence of the moral kind, which is communicated to all; the saving and sanctifying gifts and graces of the Spirit still remain, and he abides with the disciples of Christ for ever; to enlighten their understandings, to purify their hearts, to guard them from temptation, to comfort and support them in affliction, and to be as a pledge or earnest of the future glorious inheritance which is set before them in the Gospel.

This aid of the Holy Ghost is totally consistent with the use of reason, and the exercise of our natural powers. Whatever may be the efficacy of his influences upon the mind, we are still free, and at full liberty to reject or comply with them. We must not be entirely passive, like mere machines; but must attend his motions, follow his guidance, and obey his suggestions. The Divine grace, far from being an argument for sloth, is an encouragement to labour. While God works in us and for us, we must also work for ourselves. *God worketh in you*, saith the Apostle, *both to will and to do of his own good pleasure*;—he giveth you power to act, and therefore, because he giveth you power—*work out your own salvation*. Our endeavours cannot save us without his aid; nor will his aid save us without our endeavours; both must concur; we must be *workers together with him*; we must be *diligent*, in order to *make our calling and election sure*.

In the communication of Divine grace there is no outward, sensible, operation; the *fruits of the Spirit* are the only sure evidence of our being under his guidance. There is no foundation in the word of God for those bodily impressions, those inward feelings, those visions and illuminations, which some have laid down as the only proof of his assistance. These, indeed, are the fruits of an overheated imagination and enthusiastic phrenzy; but *the fruits of the Spirit are Love, Joy, Peace, Goodness, Righteousness, Truth*, and all the amiable virtues of the christian life.—*Whosoever is born of God*, whosoever is renewed in his nature, and led by the Spirit of God,—*doth not commit sin*;—doth not allow himself in any known vice—doth not commit sin wilfully and habitually.—*Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world*.—*We know that God by his Spirit dwelleth in us, if we keep his commandments*.

 Happy in the promise, that God *will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him*, let us fre-

quently and fervently pray for the invaluable gift. *Let us come with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may find grace to help in every time of need.* Be pleased, O Lord, to shed abroad his sanctifying influences on our minds, that he may become our Comforter and our Guide;—that our bodies may be preserved as his pure temples, dedicated to his service, and animated by his presence; that he may constantly dwell in our hearts; and that we may be one with Thee, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for ever.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE APOSTLES.

THE apostles were persons chosen by our Saviour upon his first entrance on his public ministry, to be *witnesses* of the purity of his life, of the doctrines he should teach, and of the miracles he should perform. *Ye have not chosen me*, says he to them, *but I have chosen you* to be my apostles and ambassadors; *and have ordained you that you should go* into the most distant countries, *and bring forth much fruit*, in converting the world to the christian faith.

The belief of the Gospel must depend upon testimony of some sort or other; and while we see the folly and absurdity of demanding such evidence as the nature of the thing will not admit, let us consider, whether the evidence we have, the evidence of the apostles, be clear and satisfactory—whether it be such as may reasonably be relied on.

As the apostles were men of plain sense and sound understanding, they were capable of *judging* concerning the truth of *facts* which were attested. They appear to have been ever present with Christ; they heard all his words, they saw all his works, and therefore they could not have been *deceived*. Did they not know that they attended him through

his whole ministry? Did they not know that they had familiarly conversed with him, and had actually seen him make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and the dead to live? Did they not know that he was persecuted, condemned, and crucified?

They had the same evidence, too, of his resurrection from the grave; they knew him to be the very person with whom they had formerly conversed. Their ears, and eyes, and hands, convinced them that it was their Master who had died upon the cross. They saw and felt him; they ate and drank with him; and during an intercourse of forty days, they had the same *infallible proofs* of his being then alive, as that he ever was alive at all.

There is another and still stronger evidence in which the apostles could not possibly be deceived. The promise which our Lord had given them, that after his departure, *he would send them another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, who should guide them into all truth*, was effectually accomplished in them. They found themselves *filled with the Holy Ghost*, and were convinced, by what they felt, of the divine power of Christ, and the truth of the Gospel. They found their sentiments quite changed, and their minds illuminated with a clear and distinct view of the Messiah and his kingdom. They found themselves enabled to speak all languages, and to work all miracles.

These gifts of the Spirit, therefore, were not imaginary and delusive; but real communications from heaven, of which they were equally certain, as they were of their own existence.

And as there is the strongest proof that the apostles could not be *deceived themselves*; so there is no just ground for suspicion that they had any intention to *deceive others*.

Look into the characters of the apostles, and you will find nothing of craft and deceit, no appearance of fraud and wickedness, in any part of

their behaviour. Their principles were worthy, and their religion rational: their tempers open and free, their manners humble and benevolent, and their sanctity pure and unblemished. These genuine marks of probity and piety leave no room for any candid judge to suspect their veracity, and to look upon them as impostors.

With what view indeed could they forge a story of this kind, and publish it to the world?—Were they influenced by the love of fame, and an ambitious hope of being distinguished as the heads and founders of a new sect? There is no part of their conduct which can furnish the least shadow for such a charge. Instead of setting up for themselves, and acting as principals, in their own name, they expressly declared, *We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*: they ascribed to him the whole merit of what they said or did, and gloried in being the servants of a crucified master.

Was there any appearance of gain and prosperity? Had they any prospect of enriching themselves by the undertaking?—There is no discovery of any instance of this kind in their writings: on the contrary, they appear to have a contempt for riches, to renounce all self-interest, and every worldly consideration. Instead of soothing the passions and prejudices of men, they preached plain naked truth, ungrateful to flesh and blood: and instead of courting the *mighty* and the *noble*, who might raise them to power and affluence, they preached to the *weak* and the *base*, who could do nothing for their advantage. The great end they had in view was to recover mankind from idolatry and sin, to the faith and obedience of the Gospel: and this end they pursued, at the hazard of every thing that was near and dear to them. They saw nothing before them, at their first setting out, but hatred and contempt, poverty and persecution; they left their friends and relations; *they left all*

they had, and wandered into all the quarters of the earth, exposing themselves to infinite sufferings, both from Jews and Gentiles. They welcomed every difficulty and danger which lay in the way of their great purpose, and at last sealed with their blood the doctrines which they preached.

Are these the marks of cheats and impostors? Can we suppose that such a number of persons, of obscure birth and mean education, without learning and without authority, should undertake to deceive the world, and propagate a falsehood? That they should renounce all their native prejudices and connexions, sacrifice their ease and interest, and expose themselves to a variety of wretchedness, only to exalt the name and honour of one by whom (in this view) they had been miserably disappointed?—that they should lay a plot, as it were, against their own lives, and contrive a scheme for their own misery,—while yet they appealed to the future judgment for their sincerity, and professed the warmest hopes of a glorious reward from the God of truth?—Can we suppose that such a number of men should form such a plan, and go through such a scene, merely to publish doctrines which they themselves did not believe; and to die in the support of facts, which they knew to be false? Is it credible? Is it, indeed, possible?

I see, then, that the apostles were *faithful witnesses*; that they were certain of the facts which they preached; and acted under their influence, steadily and consistently, from a consciousness of their own innocence and a sincere love of truth. I see a divine power going everywhere along with them, enabling them to speak languages which they had never learned, to foretel future events, and to work miracles of the most extraordinary kind. I see them carrying the Gospel into the remotest regions of the earth, diffusing its salutary rays with a rapid and amazing swiftness, and converting the world to

the *truth as it is in Jesus* : I feel the ground, therefore, upon which I stand as a Christian ; the testimony of the apostles is true ; their doctrine is divine ; Christ is the Saviour of the world ; and my faith and hope are built upon a rock, as firm and as durable as the power and the goodness of God.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE EPISTLES, AND THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN.

WHEN the apostles, by their preaching the Gospel at any place, had converted a sufficient number of persons, they formed them into a distinct congregation for divine service, and appointed proper ministers to attend the offices of religion, while they travelled on to other countries. But in virtue of their commission from Christ, they still retained an authority over the churches which they had founded ; and frequently interposed to settle controversies and disputes, to give laws and constitutions for their government, and to build them up in that holy faith in which they had been instructed.

Although most of the Epistles were written upon particular questions of dispute, which arose from the first planting of Christianity, and to correct the irregularities and errors of those churches to which they were directed ; yet the apostles took every opportunity of introducing those points of doctrine and practice which were of universal concern, and profitable for the instruction of all succeeding ages. We find them almost everywhere explaining the mysteries of the Gospel, setting forth the excellency of it, and pressing men to conform to its pure and exalted precepts.

They prove the universal necessity of such a dispensation as the Gospel, to raise men from the ruins of nature and restore them from a state of guilt and condemnation to the favour of God. They set forth the original goodness and mercy of the Almighty Father towards us, who, upon a foresight of the

wretched state into which we should fall by our sins, formed, in the counsels of his eternal grace, the glorious design of our recovery. They extol the wonderful condescension and love of the only-begotten Son of God, who being *the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person*, became a *partaker of our flesh and blood*; and having been *delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification*, is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make *intercession for us*. They describe the manifold blessings and privileges which flow to us from the Divine mercy, through the mediation of Christ: and lay before us the exceeding great and precious promises of a future glory and felicity in the kingdom of heaven. They represent faith, or believing, as the summary of what is required of us in order to the enjoyment of those blessings and promises: but declare expressly, that this faith signifies not a mere speculative assent to the truth of the Gospel, but a hearty and practical compliance with the whole method of salvation held forth to us through Jesus Christ. There is no contradiction between the Epistles of St. Paul and St. James upon this point: they are found, on a fair statement of their doctrines, to agree in one meaning, and to speak the same opinion. *The works of the Jewish religion will not save you*, says St. Paul: *nor will the bare empty faith of a Christian save you*, saith St. James.—A faith which is fruitful of good works will save you, saith St. Paul: and good works which are the proper fruits of faith will save you, saith St. James.—It is plain, indeed, from a multitude of passages in the Epistles, that the faith, by which Christians are justified and saved, is a lively and efficacious principle of religion: it is such a receiving of Christ as determineth the heart to walk in him; it is faith which purifieth the soul, and, *made perfect by good works, which they who have believed in God should be careful to maintain, for these things are good and profitable unto men*.

The last book of the New Testament is called, *The Revelation of St. John*, from his own declaration, in the first verse of it; *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, and which he signified by his angel unto his servant John*.—St. John was distinguished by the honourable appellation of the *Beloved Disciple*; he lay in the bosom of his Lord; and the sacred love of God and man was infused into his breast: he was eminently endued with his Master's spirit, and the sublimer mysteries of the universal kingdom were made known to him.

There are several Epistles in this book of the Revelation to the Churches of *Asia*, which *John* had planted, or at least cultivated and improved. The subject of them is very nearly the same, being either a commendation of their faith and virtue, or a reproof for their failings, and an exhortation to repentance and perseverance. But several parts of this book are mysterious and prophetical, and appear to be beyond the reach and comprehension of any human capacity. Many pious and learned men, in all ages of the Church, have diligently examined and endeavoured to explain these writings: but we have reason to believe, that they have never yet been fully understood by any man. They seem, however, in general to describe the state of the Church at that time in which they were written; and the future state of it to the end of the world; *the things that were, and the things that should be hereafter*.

In the conclusion of this wonderful book, with which the canon of Scripture closes, our blessed Lord, in the most awful manner, charges the apostle to denounce a dreadful sentence of condemnation against any designed alteration of the word of God. *If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life*.—You have now the whole revelation of Christ, abundantly sufficient to *make you wise unto*

salvation. Receive it as a sacred trust, to be preserved inviolate ; and never be tempted, by a desire of soothing your own passions, or the passions of others, to add to it, or to take from it. You are now to expect no more interpositions ; no further prophecies ; no new revelations ; for they are needless.—There will be *no more sacrifice for sin* ; no other scheme of salvation ; no other offer of mercy. But when our Lord shall come again, he will come in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, and to *give to every man according to his work.* And *He who testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly.*—To which gracious assurance, the devout heart of the evangelist immediately replies—and may the heart of every one reply—*Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus.*

CHAPTER LV.

THE CONCLUSION.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Inspiration is a divine influence conveying to the mind such a degree of knowledge, as it could not at that time have attained by the usual exercise of its faculties. The apostles and evangelists wrote under this sacred influence : and Christians in all ages have revered their writings, and constantly appealed to them as the infallible oracles of God.

If God sent his Son from heaven with a divine revelation for the benefit of all men, would he not take care, that the doctrines he taught, and the facts which confirmed his mission, should be preserved in authentic records ? If he intended that the Scriptures should be a standard of faith, and a rule of life for the instruction of all nations and all ages, would he not guide the hands of his penmen, and secure them from error ?—It is certain, that the apostles received a supernatural assistance in *preaching* the Gospel ; for *God himself bore witness to them*, enabled them in a moment, by the effusion of the Holy Spirit, to speak an amazing variety of languages, and to work all

kinds of miracles; and is it reasonable to suppose that less care would be taken of their *writing* than of their *speaking*?—We have strong reason, therefore, to conclude, that the apostles wrote *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*; and that the Scripture is not the word of man, but the word of God. And as God is a being of infinite knowledge, who cannot be deceived himself, and of infinite goodness, who will not deceive his creatures, it follows that his word, like himself, is light and truth, and in it is no falsehood or error at all.

Several disputes have been raised concerning the nature and degree of the inspiration of Scripture; but the plain account of the matter seems to be that, in cases which were entirely new to the apostles, and beyond their understanding, they wrote from the immediate suggestion of the Holy Spirit; and, in cases where they themselves had perfect knowledge, that sacred Person only so far presided over their minds, as to secure them from mistake and error, leaving them to the free use of their own reason, and to express their thoughts in their own words.

And as *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, so it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. It is a sufficient rule both of faith and practice: a complete measure of what is necessary to be believed or done by us: *that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, and become wise unto salvation*.

What a satisfaction must it be to have in our hands a book, containing the express will of God concerning us! what a comfort to be safely guided through the mazes of ignorance and darkness, and to have the Word of Truth for *a lamp to our feet, and a light to our paths*! How thankful should we be for it! How careful to direct our thoughts and actions by it! How attentive in perusing those holy oracles, which offer peace and pardon to the penitent, and bring life and immortality to light!

The church of Rome debars the common people from reading the Bible : she locks up the Scriptures from them, and *takes the key of knowledge out of their hands*, insisting that they have no right to judge for themselves in matters of faith, and that they ought to submit implicitly to *her* interpretations and decisions. The members of that church endeavour to support this opinion by two or three texts in the New Testament : so that they would convince you from Scripture that you have no right to judge of Scripture, which is a manifest absurdity.—But only consider : when St. *Paul* tells you, *Prove all things*, does it mean, shut your eyes, and follow the directions of the church blindfold ? When our Saviour tells us, *Search the Scriptures*, does he mean, never look into them at all ? And when he says, *Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?* does he command us to believe without inquiry, and to receive the doctrines of others without using our own reason and judgment ?

The church of England, on the contrary, invites men to read the Bible, to prove the doctrines whether they be of God, and to believe, upon a rational conviction of the truth. She appeals to the Scriptures in all questions which are proper to be tried by them : and cheerfully submits all her articles and ordinances to the test of the written word of God : being well assured, that the more she is tried and understood, the more she will be approved ; and that every ingenuous inquirer will become a firm and zealous defender.

We should take care, however, to peruse the sacred volumes with great humility and caution, without any prepossession and prejudice : not straining and torturing any passages, in order to bend them to our own favourite opinions, but follow Scripture whithersoever it naturally leads us. Whoever reads the *Bible* with a view to collect from thence a system of faith, and determine truly what is necessary to be believed, let him not pick out

single texts, or some little scraps and separate portions; nor let him expound any difficult passages in opposition to those which are clear and easy to be understood; but let him consider the nature and design of the whole revelation, and attend to the coherence and connexion of the particular discourse which he is reading, the occasion of its having been written, and the true scope and design of each passage. Let him also read at once a whole book, or a whole epistle, or at least to the end of proper periods, so as to discover the thread of reasoning, and to have an entire view of the subject: and let him make it an inviolable rule to explain doubtful and obscure parts by those which are expressed in the clearest and most simple manner: for this must be allowed to be the most natural and reasonable method of interpreting and understanding them.

It is not necessary for men to enter into perplexing controversies about speculative points, and *things hard to be understood*. They may come to the knowledge of their faith, without the deep refinements of criticism. The way to salvation is plain and obvious. Common sense and common honesty are the main requisites for finding it: and if they meet with any difficulties in their progress, let them, with a modest teachable temper, consult their proper ministers, who have dedicated themselves to studies of this kind, and are appointed, under God, to instruct and comfort those who are in doubt.

We should read the Scriptures also with *attention*. Instead of running over the words with a negligent indifference, as if we had no concern or interest in them, we should collect our wandering thoughts, and consider who it is that speaks to us there, and what it is that he says.—If there be not a close attention, there can be no improvement; all our reading will make no impression, and give no satisfaction.

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